

“A Broken Piece of an Absent Whole”:  
Experimental Video and Its Spaces of Production and Reception

by

Margot Bouman

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by  
Professor Douglas Crimp

Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies  
Department of Art and Art History  
The College  
Arts and Sciences

University of Rochester  
Rochester, New York

2008

For David and Nathaniel

## Curriculum Vitae

Margot Bouman was born in Montreal, Canada, on October 31, 1962. She attended Concordia University from 1993 to 1997 and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree cum laude in 1997. She came to the University of Rochester in the fall of 1997, beginning graduate studies in the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies. While in residence at Rochester she received a research grant from the Susan B. Anthony Institute of Gender and Women's Studies. In 2001 she received the Master of Arts degree from the University of Rochester. Bouman pursued her research into the history and theory of experimental video and video installation art under the direction of Professor Douglas Crimp, receiving a grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Archive Center in Tarrytown, New York in 2002, and a travel grant from the College Art Association in 2004. From 1998 to 2004 she was an editor for *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal in Visual Studies*. She was an adjunct at the University of Rochester from 1999 to 2001 and at Parsons The New School for Design in New York City from 2001 to 2005. In 2005 she was hired as a visiting assistant professor at Parsons. The status of her appointment was changed to assistant professor in 2007, and she will begin a new appointment as the Director of Undergraduate Studies for the School of Art and Design History and Theory at Parsons in 2008.

## Acknowledgments

The research, writing, and revision of this dissertation was made possible by the assistance of many people and institutions. I must begin by thanking my first mentors, Jennifer Fisher, Jim Drobnick, and Catherine Mackenzie. My adviser Douglas Crimp is my model and my goad. His sense of ethics results in the following convictions: that political engagement necessitates the highest standards of scholarship and writing, that fools should not be suffered, and that his students deserve his unfailing courtesy. I am grateful to Sharon Willis for her unforgettable seminar on French cultural studies, *Rhetorics of Everyday Life*, and for her editorial comments on my draft, in which she insisted that I take television-studies scholarship seriously. Joan Saab's seminar, *The Politics of Space*, pushed me into thinking about the ways in which experimental video interacts with spaces beyond broadcast television and the museum. I would also like to acknowledge Jason Middleton for agreeing to join my committee at a late date.

I benefited from extraordinary seminars given by Janet Wolff, David Rodowick, and Michael Ann Holly. Allen Topolski taught me how to teach. While I was doing my coursework, the brilliance and generosity of my colleagues and professors in the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies exemplified best practices. In Rochester I particularly valued the friendship, discipline, and intellectual engagement of Anna Williams, Tina Takemoto, Lisa Soccio, Darby English, Angela Gibson, Elizabeth Cohen, Matt Brower, Michael Williams, Cyril Reade, Lucy

Curzon, Daniela Sandler, T'ai Smith, Liz Czach, and Cat Zuromskis. The dissertation group at the Susan B. Anthony Center for Gender and Women's Studies provided invaluable support and feedback when I began writing. Its members, Ed Chan, Amy Herzog, Jennifer Hudak, Joanna Mitchell, Narin Hassan, and Kirsi Peltomäki carefully read my preliminary drafts and asked me probing questions that clarified my thoughts and helped me begin writing in earnest. Jonathan Massey's friendship and conversation has delighted me since he came to Rochester from Princeton to do research in the summer of 1998. I will always miss the indomitable Reni Celeste and her ferocious appetite for scholarship and life.

I researched and wrote my dissertation after moving to New York City in the summer of 2001. Chapter 1 benefited from the Rockefeller Archive Center's impeccably maintained records of the Rockefeller Foundation's involvement in the early years of experimental video and video art and the vast holdings of early video at Electronic Arts Intermix. The Museum of Modern Art's archives held rare print ephemera essential to my research for chapter 3, and, at the Celeste Bartos International Film Study Center, I screened normally unavailable films and videos. The archivists and librarians at all three institutions have been accessible, courteous, and professional: in particular Charles Silver, the Associate Curator of Research and Collections in the Department of Film and Media at MoMA. Most important, research for this dissertation consisted of countless visits to public video art projects, commercial art galleries, art fairs, and museums in New York City and elsewhere.

Since 2001 I have taught at Parsons The New School for Design, a division of The New School. While at Parsons, Rosemary O'Neill, Hazel Clark, and Earl Tai have mentored my scholarship and my professional development. I am grateful for the friendship of my colleagues, past and present: Elizabeth Chakkappan, Noah Chasin, Janet Kraynak, Sarah Lichstein, and Margaret Sundell. Research and scholarship funds awarded to me by the Parson's dean's office made it possible to present papers at conferences in Santa Barbara, California; Chicago, Illinois; and Madison, Wisconsin. At the College Art Association conferences in Seattle and New York City I met scholars and artists such as Katie Mondloch, Melissa Ragona, Christine Ross, and Simon Leung, who shared my interest in experimental video and video installation art. Their input carried my project forward. Members of the NSSR/Parsons Visual Culture Working Group—Tim Pachirat, Vicky Hattam, David Brody, and Orit Halpern—gave me stimulating and much-needed feedback on a draft of chapter 2. I will be forever grateful to my students for teaching me the necessity of good writing. Just as important were their questions and their pursuits, which helped give chapter 4 its conceptual shape.

My parents Hendrik Bouman and Corrie Bouman have always supported my projects in every way imaginable. My sisters Judith Bouman Watson, Anita Bouman Lamoureux, and Helen Bouman Medwid, as well as their children and husbands, remind me that worlds exist outside academia and art. I am sorry that my brother Conrad Bouman, who died in Tanzania in 1985, no longer shares his world with me. Finally, my partner, David Hill, was the first person to broach the possibility of

graduate study to me. His constancy, devotion, and care have brought me to its conclusion. Our greatest project is our son, Nathaniel.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation, “‘A Broken Piece of an Absent Whole’: Experimental Video and its Spaces of Production and Reception” presumes that where video is found—as the glass eye and window of broadcast network television, as an integral component of contemporary architecture, as one more medium in the museum, and as the newly primary visual interface of the internet—determines its form. Video also has a formative influence on the spaces into which it is inserted. The recently expanded field of video is divided in two: by “broken piece” the art historian Ann Wagner refers to experimental video and video installation art; by “absent whole,” the rest of media culture. Why this break occurs, and how it is both policed and undermined is my dissertation’s project.

In the late 1960s, experimental or avant-garde video’s space was assumed to be broadcast television, and secondarily the artist’s studio, the art gallery and the movie theater. Chapter 1 looks at the avant-garde strategies for accessing and altering broadcast television, which consisted of multipronged attacks on its complex of industry programming, audience and technological form. Its failure to maintain a lasting presence on television is used to support the argument that television’s vigorous and highly militant avant-garde did not produce any lasting cultural assets. I argue otherwise, by looking at some of the unresolved “problems” of avant-garde television that return over the ensuing decades. Following its release from the television set, video has appeared almost everywhere, on screens the size of buildings



that form a backdrop for people carrying screens that fit into their hands. Through a consideration of public video art, chapter 2 analyzes how the dismissal of broadcast television audience by the avant-garde is repeated in later responses to the newly expanded spaces of “television.” Chapter 3 looks at the changes to video’s temporal form that take place after its successful introduction into the museum in the 1990s. Chapter 4 historicizes the rhetoric dividing high art from mass culture through an analysis of attempts to split the virtual from the phenomenological in the reception of projected video environments.

## Table of Contents

Preface .....	1
Chapter 1 Utopian Imaginaries of the Avant-Garde: 1960s and 1970s Experiments with Broadcast Television .....	7
1.1 Introduction: Avant-Garde Television .....	7
1.2 The Rockefeller Foundation and the Public Broadcasting Service .....	33
1.3 West German Broadcast Television .....	58
1.4 Revolutionary Television in France and Mozambique .....	69
1.5 Conclusion .....	84
Chapter 2 Between Distraction and Attention: What Does It Mean for Movement to Be Public? .....	89
2.1 Introduction: “Seeing-in” .....	89
2.2 Distraction and the Television Audience .....	97
2.3 Expanded Television .....	105
2.4 Stan Douglas: The Zwolle Proposal .....	119
2.5 Paul Pfeiffer: <i>Orpheus Descending</i> (2001) .....	132
2.6 Doug Aitken: <i>Sleepwalkers</i> (2007) .....	154
2.7 Conclusion .....	165
Chapter 3 Disjunctures in Institutional Time: The Museum and the Loop as a Temporal Form .....	167
3.1 Introduction: Buildings and Routines .....	167
3.2 Video’s Entry into the Studio, Art Gallery, Art Fair, and Museum .....	174
3.3 Critical Reception of Contemporary Video Installation .....	193
3.4 New Institutional Time: The Loop .....	205
3.4.1 Stan Douglas: <i>Win, Place, or Show</i> (1997) .....	205
3.4.2 Marijke van Warmerdam: <i>Sprong</i> (1994) .....	208
3.4.3 Douglas Gordon: <i>Through a Looking Glass</i> (1999) .....	211

3.4.4	Doug Aitken, <i>Electric Earth</i> (1999) .....	215
3.4.5	Pierre Huyghe: <i>Streamside Day Follies</i> (2004) .....	224
3.5	Conclusion .....	230
Chapter 4	Confusions of Nearness: The Virtual and the Phenomenological in Projected Video Environments .....	233
4.1	Introduction: Mapping the Studio, Mapping the Museum .....	233
4.2	Immersion and Autonomy .....	239
4.3	The Anti-Entertainment Polemics .....	254
4.4	Sense as Carnal Matter, Sense as Conscious Meaning .....	268
4.5	Irit Batsry: <i>Set</i> (2003) .....	278
4.6	Virtual Reality .....	281
4.7	Conclusion .....	288
References	.....	291

## Preface

In 2007 the media critic Martha Gever repeated an observation made in 2005 by the video and new media scholar Michael Rush at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> Rush, Gever told her *Art Journal* readers, had asserted that “video art has become a historical category, no longer applicable to current practices.”<sup>2</sup> His assessment, she continued, “signaled the end of the decades-long struggle by many artists to achieve acceptance of video as an art form on a par with paintings or sculpture, for example.” For Rush (according to Gever), “The success of video art seems to have lead to its irrelevance....”<sup>3</sup>

When Gever refers to a decades-long struggle, and Rush to the new irrelevance of video art, their characterizations bracket the emergence and disappearance of video art between two revolutionary moments. As this narrative would have it, video art “begins” in the late 1960s and 1970s. That this period was revolutionary is not up for debate. However, I would dispute Gever’s use of the phrase “video art;” in doing so, she elides the true revolution of this earlier period. In chapter 1 I propose the alternative descriptive “avant-garde television,” in order to better define the struggle by artists, filmmakers and activists in the 1960s and 1970s to overturn the then-dominant mass media institution, commercial broadcast

---

<sup>1</sup> Representative publications by Michael Rush include *Video Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) and *New Media in Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Martha Gever, “Like TV: Barbara Kruger’s *Twelve*,” *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

television.<sup>4</sup> Gever's phrase is especially puzzling given her earlier publications, in which she chronicles the transformation of television revolutionaries into successful mainstream artists. Furthermore, in the decade immediately following this period—the 1980s—emerging forms of video art were seen to be deserting the radical promise that had been held out by avant-garde television.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, by misidentifying avant-garde television as video art, Gever and others write the historical relationship between the avant-garde and television out of experimental video's history. My dissertation begins with a reconsideration of this period, and the conditions that led to the suppression of this relationship.

As the current avalanche of publications attest, we again find ourselves in a revolutionary moment—one that has been compared to the invention of the Gutenberg press—the computer age, which in the past five to ten years has given rise to new media. A cursory survey of the online MIT press catalogue turns up the following titles under the heading “Art and New Media”: *Ars Electronica: Facing the Future: A Survey of Two Decades*, ed. Timothy Druckrey (1999); *Art and Innovation: The Xerox PARC Artist-in-Residence Program*, ed. Craig Harris (1999); and *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (2005). New media's history has been carved out of territory typically assigned to video art in books like *Buffalo Heads: Media Study, Media Practice, Media Pioneers, 1973-1990*, ed. Woody Vasulka and Peter Weibel (2008).

---

<sup>4</sup> Also see chapter 1 for a literature review.

<sup>5</sup> See Martha Gever “Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere,” *Art Journal* 45, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 238-243.

This retroactive reassignment is especially interesting, given that Woody Vasulka and Peter Weibel have historically been identified as video art pioneers. New media's new past and its present appears to displace video art. In chapter 4, I consider how an integral component of new media, virtuality, makes its presence felt in contemporary projected video environments. New media, I hasten to add, is the subject neither of this dissertation nor of this preface: my subject is, rather, what has been shunted aside by this "new" revolutionary moment, the experimental video and video installation art that has been produced in the past decade.<sup>6</sup> Instead of hewing to this formulation of experimental video—two revolutions frame the maturation of a medium whose importance has become dissipated through its institutional success—my dissertation will propose an alternative narrative more compelling than "the death of video art."

By the mid- to-late-1990s, film and video installation art dominated contemporary art venues, particularly art fairs and biennials. As I show in chapter 3, the rise of this medium was both meteoric and greeted by many within the art community with a sense of discomfort. The residual effects of avant-garde television's transitory modernism, I argue, lie at the root of this unease, in that avant-garde television's collapse was brought about in part by a mistrust of popular culture and commercial broadcast television's audience. Film and video installation art's critics complained that its new predominance turned the museum, the art fair and the biennial into mass media outlets, stripping them of their special status as redoubts

---

<sup>6</sup> Lev Manovich, one of new media's most influential scholars, now refers to the study of new media as "software studies." Missing from this new title is, of course, the hardware on which the software is presented. Nevertheless, Manovich's choice reflects the inevitable aging of "new" media.

from an endless barrage of popular culture.<sup>7</sup> This criticism of film and video installation art comes from both conservative art critics and art historians drawing on the critical theory of Theodor Adorno. For Adorno, looking at art required conscious, intellectual engagement on the part of the individual. As I will argue in chapters 2 and 4, this tradition of criticism depends in turn on the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, who understood that the reward for aesthetic labor was a flowering of consciousness that prepared direct intuition for a system of pure reason.

This “consciousness through art” has come to be equated with a form of attention that has been opposed to distraction. In chapter 2, in an analysis of contemporary public video art, I consider at length how these historical associations between attention and art, on the one hand, and distraction and mass or popular culture, on the other, have become politicized. Responses similar to the champions of avant-garde television have emerged following the changes that “television” has undergone in the past decade. Just as the introduction of television sets altered the domestic interior, I consider how expanded television—which forms a site of debate, optimism and anxiety for theorists of the public sphere—has changed the very architecture it occupies following its growth into spaces outside of the home.<sup>8</sup>

Both avant-garde television’s transitory modernism and Adorno-inspired critical theory understand the interaction between art and mass media, attention and distraction to be dialectical: art and attention on one side, mass media and distraction on the other. The case against film and video art is laid out in these terms in 2000 by

---

<sup>7</sup> See chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>8</sup> For a literature review of expanded television see chapter 2.

Anne Wagner, when she suggests that the new, ambitious, video installations provide pleasures similar to the ones available to the viewer glued to his or her TV set at home. Quoting video artist Gary Hill (who in turn paraphrased Robert Smithson), Wagner identified video as “the non-site of t.v.,” or a “broken piece of an absent whole”:

Television, in other words, is the site—vast, unmapped, unedited—that video and its attendant mediated performances picture and articulate by negative reversal, as a broken piece of an absent whole. Does this mean that when these new media begin to offer pleasure and entertainment their critical dimension is lost?<sup>9</sup>

In a similar vein, Hal Foster advocates the autonomy of the art object and thus its distinction from media culture. For Foster, autonomy distinguishes art from the distractive conditions produced by, in his words, our “media/web world.”<sup>10</sup> As I will explore at some length in chapter 4, Foster dismissed work such as projected video environments, which produce immersive spaces, creating an aestheticized version of an experience already familiar to the museum visitor through the presence of television in and outside the home, video games, and the internet.

Broadcast television, public thruways, and the museum are all spaces where experimental video exists as a part of the broader stream of media culture despite repeated attempts to suppress this interrelationship. In this dissertation, finally, I argue that the compelling aspect of historical and contemporary video is not its beginning or its end, but rather the way in which it has refused divisions between

---

<sup>9</sup> Ann M. Wagner, “Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence,” *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 80.

<sup>10</sup> Hal Foster and Marquard Smith: “Polemics, Postmodernism, Immersion, Militarized Space,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 3 (2004): 326.



mass culture and high culture. In so doing, it pushes at the boundary of art criticism dedicated to policing this divide.

## Chapter 1

### Utopian Imaginaries of the Avant-Garde: 1960s and 1970s Experiments with Broadcast Television

The revolution will not be televised.

— Gil Scott-Heron

The television will not be revolutionized.

— James Surowiecki

#### 1.1 Introduction: Avant-Garde Television

A 1978 review of the public lecture and screening given by the video artist Nam June Paik at the Boston Film/Video Foundation situates Paik's work in relation to the elements of chance and failure in broadcast television. Initial attempts of artists, filmmakers and activists to use broadcast television as a medium in the late 1960s and the 1970s, writes Robert Stewart, signaled

the beginning of a fascination with the flaws, the glitches, the bugs in television—unexpected moments that spring to mind more readily than the bland preprogrammed programming....A TV newscaster who killed herself on camera. A streaker on the Academy Awards. A cameraman in Bryan, Texas, so startled by Harlan Ellison's blunt rap that he nervously began to show the TV audience a meandering shot of the ceiling....Relatives of fifty-four-year-old Maud Walker who were given a videotape of her fatal heart attack after winning the Big Money on *Temptation*, a daytime Australian game show.<sup>11</sup>

The flaws of television technology, mistakes made by the networks' employees, and intrusions of the real lives (and deaths) of network guests were seen by artists, filmmakers, and activists interested in commercial broadcast television as avatars, which signaled ruptures in television's underlying infrastructure, thereby interrupting

---

<sup>11</sup> Robert Stewart, "Paik's Peak," *The Real Paper*, October 21, 1978.

an otherwise continuous broadcast. As the film and video curator John Hanhardt wrote, by capitalizing on these ruptures, “artists working with video in the early 1960s were engaged in a utopian impulse to refashion television into a dialogue of visual and auditory experiences” that would allow them to bring about real social change.<sup>12</sup> Broadcast television’s audience members were also understood to be active participants. Stewart relates an anecdote from the June 1972 *Harpers* by the journalist Jonathan Prince: when reaching to adjust a pink and purple image of Richard Nixon on a television set at an airport luncheonette, “a waitress smiled [at Prince] and said, ‘don’t change it; it’s better that way.’”<sup>13</sup> The United States advertising industry, Stewart continues, conceives of its viewers as statistics, market shares, “a Crumb character, beer in hand, glassy-eyed before his set.” This kind of passivity, however, was not necessarily understood by activists, artists, and filmmakers to be the audience’s lived reality. Rather, segments of the television audience made what Stewart describes as “DIY video art” when they watched television with the picture on and the sound off or when they discovered “the Jungian concept of synchronicity for themselves by combining their TV set’s image with sound from their turntable.”

The distinctive nature of television as a complex of television audience, technological form, and industry programming (Stewart’s “bland, preprogrammed programming”), was first identified by Raymond Williams as “flow”:

In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow. This

---

<sup>12</sup> John G. Hanhardt, “Dé-Collage/Collage,” in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, eds. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Stewart.

phenomenon of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form.<sup>14</sup>

In this sparse definition, Williams suggests that flow organizes television as a system that produces not only content, but also viewing and reception. Each element is in turn associated with—but not strictly determined by—institutional prerogatives. Conceptually, “flow” represents the circulation among television technology, the institutional conditions of programming and content, and the viewer’s experience.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the glitches, mistakes, and multiple interpretations that interrupted the flow of broadcast television were commonplace events in a system that was, at the time, relatively new. Stewart contends that these interruptions constituted minor subversions. The potential force of his interpretation, however, can be measured through another example: Meaghan Morris describes a similar programming interruption that took place in Australia in the 1960s similar to the one Stewart catalogs, but more intensely realized. A cyclone had cut off communications for thirty-six hours between Darwin, a remote city on the northern edge of the continent, and the rest of Australia. For television viewers the disaster began (as it does anywhere) with the following announcement: “We interrupt this transmission for a special news flash.”<sup>15</sup> A torrent of information would typically follow such an interruption, but, as Morris recounts, this “occasion was alarmingly different. The announcer’s voice actually stammered: ‘er...um...something’s happened to Darwin’....the catastrophe was that there was *no* information. This was not a

---

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 80.

<sup>15</sup> Meaghan Morris, “Banality in Cultural Studies,” in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold, 1996), 152.

catastrophe on TV.”<sup>16</sup> Rather, the silence itself was “now the very definition of a state of total emergency.... Losing control of all mechanisms of assuring credibility, [the announcer’s] palpable, personal distress had exposed us, unbelievably, to something like a truth.” The failure of information normally made possible by live television functioned as an aporia in the flow. In this way television, as Morris puts it, “generates the real to the extent that any interruption in its process of doing so is experienced as more catastrophic in the lounge room than a ‘real’ catastrophe elsewhere.”<sup>17</sup> That a stammer functions as a reality effect on and for television was also a concept used by Gilles Deleuze in his theorization of Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville’s 1976 television series *Six-fois deux: Sur et sous la communication* (*Six Times Two: Above and Below Communications*). For Deleuze, both Godard’s interview style and his television work functioned like a stammer, or an inadvertent speech pattern that alienates the speaker from his or her own language and, by extension, meaning. This formal expression of alienation was instrumental to Godard’s refusal to be “duped by TV,” a refusal that he presumed would be successfully transmitted to his and Miéville’s audience.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning with *Le gai savoir* (*The Joy of Knowledge*, 1968), Godard engaged with television as a direct response to the events leading up to and ensuing from the student revolts in France in May 1968. More broadly, utopian imaginaries compelled the headlong rush in the 1960s and 1970s by artists, filmmakers, and activists from

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>18</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Three Questions on *Six Times Two*,” *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 38.

North America and Europe to enter the field of broadcast television and to exploit the formal, cultural, and political possibilities opened up by the types of interruptions and accidents Stewart, Morris, and Deleuze describe. Thanks in part to the widespread release of one of the first portable video cameras (the Sony Portapak), from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s broadcast television became the obsessive focus of a new utopian moment, which was understood by these artists, filmmakers, and activists—and, crucially, the institutions that supported them—as a way to challenge the sites of television production, the channels of delivery, and assumptions about the built-in passivity of television’s reception. A “systematic, but also a utopian critique,” Martha Rosler observes,

was implicit in video’s early use, for the effort was not [only] to enter the [mass media] system but [also] to transform every aspect of it and...to redefine [this] system out of existence by merging art with social life and [by] making audience and producer interchangeable.<sup>19</sup>

The media scholar Deirdre Boyle writes that Sony’s mid-1960s introduction of the Portapak to the U.S. market

was like a media version of the Land Grant Act, inspiring a heterogeneous mass of American hippies, avant-garde artists, student-intellectuals, lost souls, budding feminists, militant blacks, flower children, and jaded journalists to take to the streets, if not the road, Portapak in hand, to stake out the new territory of alternative TV.<sup>20</sup>

A similar interest emerged simultaneously in Canada and parts of Europe. The media scholar and art historian Dieter Daniels writes

---

<sup>19</sup> Martha Rosler, “Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment,” *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* eds. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Deirdre Boyle, “Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited,” *Art Journal* 45, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 228.

Around 1968-1969 it suddenly seemed as though television could become the art form of the future—and conversely that the Muse’s kiss could wake the “sleeping lion” television. At almost the same time...programs started to be made by TV stations and artists working together that were historic milestones in the interplay between art and the mass media. In an astonishingly short time...TV art...was overtaken by a reinvigorated utopian spirit.<sup>21</sup>

This utopian spirit was phrased in more pragmatic terms when Gene Youngblood asked Brice Howard, the director of The National Center for Experiments in Television (a research center affiliated with the U.S. public television station KQED) how the center had succeeded in addressing the two questions it asked: “What is the nature of the [television] medium? Can an artist work in it?”<sup>22</sup>

The utopian imaginaries that compelled certain forms of television production during this period maintain important similarities to and differences from the scattered response of artists and art collectives who first greeted television with unalloyed pleasure. As Daniels points out, the earlier response was “unclouded by actual experience of the medium.”<sup>23</sup> It first took the form of a futurist manifesto for television in 1933, “La radia.” Through its power to obliterate the distances between spaces, Italian futurists saw television in the hands of the artist as a potential tool for Fascist media power:

We now possess a television of fifty thousand points for every large image on a screen. As we await the invention of teletouch, telesmell and teletaste we Futurists are perfecting radio broadcasting which is destined to multiply a

---

<sup>21</sup> Dieter Daniels, “Television—Art or Anti-Art?—Conflict and Cooperation between the Avant-garde and the Mass Media in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*, eds. Rudolf Frieling and Dieter Daniels (New York: SpringerWien, 2004), 70.

<sup>22</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1970), 283.

<sup>23</sup> Daniels, 59.

hundredfold the creative genius of the Italian race, to abolish the ancient nostalgic torment of long distance.<sup>24</sup>

In 1952 the introduction of broadcast television in Italy gave the spatialists (a movement founded by Lucio Fontana that called for art to embrace science and technology) the opportunity to expand their ideas about space. For Fontana and his movement (foreshadowing the later work by Gerry Schum), television offered the potential to dematerialize art. Like the futurists—but without their Fascist cant—the spatialists welcomed the impending arrival of television in their “Spatialist Manifesto for Television,” read on television in an experimental transmission by RAI-TV in Milan on May 17, 1952:

Television is an artistic device we have been awaiting for a long time, and it will integrate our concepts. We are pleased that this manifesto, which is intended to revivify all realms of art, will be broadcast by Italian television. It is true that art is eternal, but it has always been bound to matter. We want to liberate it from these shackles, we want it to last in space for a thousand years—even if only a single minute is broadcast.<sup>25</sup>

No recording remains of this live broadcast, which was the last of the spatialist manifestos.

The manifestos by the futurists and Fontana that predated the “landrush” in the late 1960s took place alongside the enthusiastic and outsized claims that industry insiders in the United States made for television, which was teetering on the edge of commercial viability in the interwar period and around the end of World War II.

---

<sup>24</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Pino Masnata, “La radia (1933),” trans. Stephen Sartarelli. Reprinted in Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds. *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 265–266.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Dieter Daniels, “Media → Art / Art → Media: Forerunners of Media Art in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” in *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*, eds. Rudolf Frieeling and Dieter Daniels (New York: SpringerWien, 2004), 31.



Broadcast television began in the United States, the United Kingdom and (in an experimental form) in Nazi Germany in the mid-to-late-1930s. The 1936 Berlin Olympics was broadcast from twenty-five television studios in Berlin. The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) began broadcasting November 2, 1936 in the United Kingdom and was shut down following the Nazi invasion of Poland on September 3, 1939. Broadcasting resumed in 1946. Television broadcasting began in the United States in the late 1930s, but was suspended for the duration of the war (following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941): it did not resume until the first wave of station activations from 1946 through 1948. While this chapter focuses on examples of broadcast television work by filmmakers and artists from both Europe and the United States, the earlier utopian pronouncements made by U.S. commercial broadcast industry insiders are, although they come from an unexpected source, insightful and remarkably prescient.

In his 1946 book *Here Is Television*, Thomas Hutchinson, the manager of the television department at NBC (National Broadcasting Company), in the 1930s and later a production director with the RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Television Corporation, wrote,

Television means the world in your home and in the homes of all the people in the world. It is the greatest means of communication ever developed by the mind of man. It should do more to develop friendly neighbors, and to bring understanding and peace on earth, than any other single material force in the world today.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Hutchinson, *Here Is Television: Your Window to the World* (New York: Hastings House, 1946), xi. See also Robert E. Lee, *Television: The Revolution* (New York: Essential Books, 1944).

David Sarnoff, the president of RCA (Radio Corporation of America) at the time, was the primary commercial and political force behind the launch of broadcast television in the United States. At the televised opening of the RCA Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, Sarnoff announced the following:

Now we add sight to sound. It is with a feeling of humbleness that I come to this moment of announcing the birth, in this country, of a new art so important in its implications that it is bound to affect all society. It is an art which shines like a torch in a troubled world.<sup>27</sup>

At the dawn of its commercially viable life in the United States, then, broadcast television's utopian visionaries were network executives such as Hutchinson and Sarnoff (and later Sylvester Weaver).

While broadcast television in the United States was (and is) overwhelmingly commercial, at the time the government was (and remains) also instrumental to its formation. From the beginning, the need for governmental standardization and regulation of both radio and television broadcast bandwidth was understood. In the United States, bandwidth frequencies are "owned" by the U.S. population and licensed to private broadcasters.<sup>28</sup> By renewing (or threatening to withhold) license privileges, the government regulates radio and television. Commerce committees in both the House and Senate are charged with overseeing six agencies, including the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and with ensuring their service as

---

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Henry Kressel, *Competing for the Future: How Digital Innovations are Changing the World* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to this system of checks and balances, ownership also expanded from radio to television—for example, RKO and RCA. RCA was founded in 1919 out of security concerns on the part of the U.S. government and military over the foreign ownership (by the British Marconi Corporation) of the radio communications infrastructure. Radio provided television not only ownership but also its own pool of entertainment talent and a programming structure. Most critically, the advertising framework first developed in radio was transferred to television.

“arms of the Congress.”<sup>29</sup> The language of the Communications Act of 1934, which sets out the mandate of the FCC, is purposefully vague: The FCC is supposed to look after “public interest, convenience and security” (language borrowed from the Interstate Commerce Act), but, as the Kennedy-appointed chair of the FCC, Newton Minow, pointed out, this phrase has never been explicitly defined: to a broadcaster with a highly rated program, “public interest” could be defined as “that which interests the public.”<sup>30</sup> This vagueness was intentional; in the early 1930s, in order to encourage investment in radio stations, the drafters of the Communications Act chose not to set up broadcasting as a public utility with the same ceiling on potential profits or governmental oversight as, say, electricity or gas.

Sarnoff’s and Hutchinson’s characterizations of television as a new delivery system for art that is instrumental to achieving world peace stand alongside the vision of Minow, who understood the mandate of television to be the creation of an informed public. Minow wrote:

---

<sup>29</sup> The Communications Act of 1934 <http://www.fcc.gov/Reports/1934new.pdf> The Radio Act of 1927 provided regulation in response to entrepreneurs who were interested in operating broadcasting stations and manufacturing broadcasting equipment. Prior to the Radio Act, weak regulations resulted in broadband piracy. If a particular frequency became popular, multiple station operators would squat on the frequency, sometimes drowning out the original station. The Radio Act guaranteed radio monopolies in a given geographical area. See <http://showcase.netins.net/web/akline/pdf/1927act.pdf> This system of geographical monopolies, as well as a more general need for government oversight carried over from radio to television. In Europe as well as Canada, the allocation and regulation of bandwidth use was originally established through a state-run broadcasting system. For example, fearing cultural annexation into the U.S. radio system, in 1928 a Royal Commission was appointed “to examine the broadcasting situation in the Dominion of Canada and to make recommendations to the Government as to the future administration thereof.” The Aird Commission Report recommended that a national company be founded to own and operate all radio stations in Canada. The Canadian Broadcasting Act of 1936 established the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation as a crown corporation (or a state-controlled company with an arm’s-length relation to the government), that was charged with carrying on a national broadcasting service within the country. In the United Kingdom, the BBC was financed through direct taxation of the listening and viewing audience.

<sup>30</sup> Newton Minow, *Equal Time: The Private Broadcaster and the Public Interest*, ed. Lawrence Laurent (New York: Atheneum, 1964), viii.

I believe that the future of this nation—of the democratic ideal—and the world depends on an enlightened electorate, on an informed citizenry. And I believe that nothing in the history of man approaches the potential of television for information and misinformation, for enlightenment and obfuscation, for sheer reach and sheer impact.<sup>31</sup>

Minow was not alone in his belief that television had a duty to create an informed public, nor were Sarnoff and Hutchinson in their conviction that the arts would function as the gateway to democracy.

As Brian Rose explains in his book on the performing arts and television, the early history of U.S. television is marked by a struggle between highbrow and lowbrow programming.<sup>32</sup> Given the prohibitive cost of television sets, in the latter half of the 1940s television consumption was restricted either to the affluent or to public spaces such as taverns. Thus the broadcasting of highbrow culture such as ballet and opera on the one hand, and fiddlers and folk dancers on the other provided cheap access to entertainment. ABC (American Broadcasting Company) broadcast performances by the Metropolitan Opera, and CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) Broadway plays. NBC went one step further and created its own opera company. Local stations in Minneapolis and Chicago presented weekly programs of their symphony orchestras. The theater, radio, and television director Robert E. Lee projected that television would give rise to a language of operatic performance by providing new opportunities to composers and librettists to write operas specifically

---

<sup>31</sup> Minow, viii.

<sup>32</sup> Brian Rose, *Television and the Performing Arts: A Handbook and Reference Guide to American Cultural Programming* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 1.

for television. Furthermore, NBC's Hutchinson predicted that "television would do for dance what radio has done for speech."<sup>33</sup>

As sales of television sets increased exponentially (tripling from the late 1940s to the early 1950s), networks adjusted their programming to a more populist fare.<sup>34</sup> Given the high cost of television programming, "cultural programming"—as performing-arts programming came to be defined—was particularly vulnerable to budget cuts. Nevertheless, the impulse to include high culture in the broadcast day as a form of public service continues. In 1952 the NBC executive Sylvester Weaver launched Operation Frontal Lobe, a widely publicized plan to integrate "the cultural, informative, expository and inspirational into existing entertainment patterns."<sup>35</sup> Weaver hoped that a policy of "enlightenment through exposure" that introduced "some element of culture or information in nearly every program in our schedule" would lead to a new era of responsible programming.<sup>36</sup>

I believe that we must open it [the window of television] so that the greatest numbers of people can look out and see the best, the most rewarding views. We must expose all of our people to the thrilling rewards that come from an understanding of fine music, ballet, the literary classics, science, art, everything. We could, of course, present cultural events to smaller audiences who are already mentally attuned to them. But to program for the intellectual alone is easy and duplicates other media. To make us all into intellectuals—there is the challenge of television.<sup>37</sup>

Repeatedly, in the texts and policies links are drawn by these early advocates of television's utopian possibilities between the intellectual evolution of the viewing

---

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Rose, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Rose, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Sylvester Weaver, "Enlightenment Through Exposure," *Television Magazine* (January 1952): 31.

<sup>36</sup> Sylvester Weaver, "Enlightenment Through Exposure is NBC Technique," *Musical America* (February 15, 1952): 25.

<sup>37</sup> Weaver, "Enlightenment Through Exposure is NBC Technique," 25.

public, the conception of television as an unparalleled communications tool, art with a capital A, and the flourishing of democracy. Culture maintains Matthew Arnold's nineteenth-century definition, as "the best which has been thought and said in the world."<sup>38</sup> The arts conceived for television, however (an exception is Lee's vision of the evolution of opera into a form written for television), were formed and developed apart from television. Television was understood by corporate and government executives in this period as the window through which viewers could access culture or as a neutral delivery system to the masses, rather than as a system of technology, content production, and reception, whose multifold aspects could in turn be experimented with and manipulated.

By the early 1960s, television had become a vehicle for mass media. In 1961 Minow, then newly appointed as chair of the FCC, gave a now infamous speech, the "Vast Wasteland," to the National Association of Broadcasters. Minow was extremely critical of television broadcasters for not, in his view, doing more to fulfill the charge to serve the public interest set out in the Communications Act of 1934:

When television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air...I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland.

You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence, and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials-many screaming, cajoling, and offending. And most of all, boredom.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Samuel Lipman (1869, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Minow, 52.

It was to Minow's despair that, thanks to television's predominance and to its easy accessibility as a form of entertainment—from westerns such as *Gunsmoke*, sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy*, variety shows such as *The Milton Berle Show*, and quiz shows such as *Twenty-One* and *Dotto*—television had become synonymous with kitsch. This betrayed the implicit promise of broadcast television as a force for world peace and progress through an educated public. Kitsch is also the opposite of the avant-garde. Because of its pleasant, easy quality it glosses over the fundamentally broken nature of modern life. In this way, kitsch maintains an illusion of wholeness, through which individuals can painlessly forget their inner conflicts. At the same time kitsch is mechanical, cold, and cliché-ridden.

Thus industry executives and government officials “inside” television (or Hutchinson, Lee, Weaver, and then Minow) understood high art—opera, ballet, and the theater—as cultural forms that served the public interest, and, by extension, democracy, while they saw mass media as fundamentally undemocratic. One result of this worldview was the Public Broadcasting System of 1969, brought about by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. In the act, Congress declared that it is a matter of public interest to “encourage the growth and development of public radio and television broadcasting, including the use of such media for instructional, educational, and cultural purposes;” that “public telecommunications and the diversity of its programming depend on freedom, imagination, and initiative on both local and national levels;” and furthermore that it was important to support the “development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved

and underserved audiences.”<sup>40</sup> The unintended consequences of this were twofold: any effort to promote high culture as an emissary of democracy was thereafter largely restricted to broadcasts on the Public Broadcasting System, and consequently the commercial broadcast network audience was seen as outside, or beyond, democracy.

Before the late 1960s, a sense of resignation about television, considered to be a lost cause for both culture and democracy, was felt not only by broadcast executives and civil servants like Weaver and Minow but also by artists and their supporters. Already by the time the decade began, broadcast television was perceived from without to be a monolithic institution, desperately in need of being dismantled and rebuilt from the ground up. Individual artists were working on alternative models to win the medium back, at least symbolically, with no hope of lasting effect. Examples include Wolf Vostell’s *Television Décollage for Millions* (1959)—a (rejected) proposal that WDR (West German Radio and Television Broadcasting) III, Cologne, air three minutes of blurred television programming—Tom Wesselman’s incorporation of working television sets into his paintings such as *Great American Nude #39* (1962), and Günther Uecker’s *TV 1963*, a television set studded with nails and painted white. With the introduction of the portable video camera, artists, filmmakers, and activists believed they possessed a technological advantage over the broadcast television institutions, giving them a new route to power, that stood in

---

<sup>40</sup> The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is a non profit public broadcasting television service with member television stations across the United States (354 as of 2007). It is owned collectively by its member stations, and its operations are partly funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a separate entity funded in turn by the U.S. federal government. PBS started broadcasting on Monday October 5, 1970. Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as amended Subpart D—Corporation for Public Broadcasting Sec. 396. [47 U.S.C. 396] Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



opposition to mass media: as Daniels put it, “all media art [had become] anti-media art.”<sup>41</sup>

In so doing, these activists, artists, and filmmakers carried forward the project begun by the artistic avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century: to work at the ruptures created by the accelerated changes to living conditions precipitated by modernity, and to respond to the rise of kitsch. In reaction to the false values of wholeness and continuity promoted by kitsch, the avant-garde extolled purity and authenticity. In the early twentieth century Adolf Loos and Adolphe Behne, among others, asserted that it was the task of the intellectual both to address these ruptures and to develop a new basis for culture, given that culture could no longer be established on a self-evident continuum of tradition.<sup>42</sup> Refusing to deny modernity’s ruptures—rather, as the examples I provided at the beginning of the chapter demonstrate, it exacerbates them—the strategy of broadcast television’s avant-garde consisted of a direct attack, constantly engaging in an iconoclastic struggle. The avant-garde regarded itself in the 1920s and in the 1960s, in Clement Greenberg’s words, as the only “living culture we have right now.”<sup>43</sup> In “becoming kitsch,” television not only fell short of the early promise heralded by Weaver, Hutchinson, and Lee, it also formed the natural target and opposite term for the modernist avant-

---

<sup>41</sup> Daniels, 29.

<sup>42</sup> For example Adolf Loos, *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897-1900*, ed. Aldo Rossi, trans. Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982); Adolphe Behne, “Art, Craft, Technology,” in *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architectural Culture 1880-1920*, ed. Francesco Dal Co (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 324-338.

<sup>43</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 1: *Perceptions and Judgements 1939-1944*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 22.

garde active in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, even as Daniels points out that all media art became antimedia art, or a form placed in opposition to mass media, he ends by arguing that since the “high-low distinction never took hold [in television] in the way that it did in film,” therefore there is “no form of high television culture that could be seen as a lasting cultural asset to be preserved for future generations.”<sup>44</sup>

Notwithstanding this failure to provide a “lasting cultural asset to be preserved for future generations,” the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the emergence of a vigorous and highly militant form of avant-garde television. This avant-garde is clearly distinguished from earlier attempts by Hutchinson, Sarnoff, Weaver and Minow to reform or introduce democracy through the arts: first, by the drive to make television itself into an art form, not merely a conveyance for art, and second, by the desire to dismantle and rebuild television technology; the institutions of programming and content; and most important, the viewer’s experience. This chapter focuses on the utopian imaginaries of the producers of avant-garde television, which in turn fall under Renato Poggioli’s four characteristics of the avant-garde: activism, antagonism, nihilism, and agonism.<sup>45</sup>

For Poggioli, the activist moment at times becomes an urge to action, which can be (but is not necessarily) linked to a positive goal. The manifestos and commentary by the critics, theorists, art collectives, foundation supporters, and community activists in Europe and North America that were caught up in the early

---

<sup>44</sup> Daniels, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (1962, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968). For his discussion of activism, see 27–30; of antagonism, 25–26; of nihilism, 61–65; of agonism, 65–66.

video movement of the 1960s and the early 1970s reflect an optimistic commitment to cultural change that verges on the ecstatic. In the United States collectives such as Global Village (which, founded by John Reilley and Julie Gustaffson in 1969, still produces independent video documentaries, schedules workshops and seminars, has regular screenings, and functions as a video study center), Videofreex (begun by David Cort), The Alternative Media Center at New York University (the repository of an important archive of documentary video, many by artists, which was started by George Stoney and Red Burns) and the People's Video Theater (started by the painters Ken Marsh and Howard Gutstadt) sprang up. In Canada, eight different federal departments (through the National Film Board of Canada) funded an ambitious program, Challenge for Change. Designed to popularize film and video production, the program's guiding principle was that film and video were instrumental to social change and the eventual eradication of poverty. In Germany, the video collective Telewissen (a play on words that translates as both "tele-knowledge" and "tele-vision") was founded in 1969 in Darmstadt by Herbert Schuhmacher. In Austria, *Kontakt*, a magazine-format television program, focused on the "alternative" movement in the early 1970s. One episode presented an interview with Frank Zappa consisting of uninterrupted laughter by Zappa and the interviewer. Another presented the first video works of Austrian video artists. Peter Wiebel, borrowing from Adolf Loos's dictum that "ornament is a crime" titled a work *Picturing Is a Crime*. And a television action by Valie Export, *Facing a Family*, placed a family in the television studio, where they sat staring into the camera, staring

back at all the families in their living rooms.<sup>46</sup> In 1972 Douglas Davis wrote in *Artforum*: “The video structure is now open to change. For a scant minute in the history of the medium the situation is existentialist.”<sup>47</sup> When the art historian Robert Pincus-Witten questioned the video artist Frank Gillette about broadcast television’s institutional impenetrability at a conference held at MoMA on the new television, Gillette responded that “the ubiquity [of television] plus a redefined world view” would redirect the “informational process...toward universal accessibility.”<sup>48</sup>

The antagonistic character of the avant-garde refers to the struggle it perpetually wages against the public, tradition and institutions. For Poggioli, this becomes manifest through a systemic revolt against every institution, and an aversion to all rules and norms that borders on anarchy. In *Radical Software* (a magazine dedicated to new video that was published from 1970–1974), Paul Ryan (a founder of the video collective Raindance Corporation) announced that the concerns of portable video were comparable to those of guerrilla warfare, in which the guerrilla fighter generally moves invisibly, attacking by surprise and in unexpected places, because he knows the terrain:

Traditional guerrilla warfare is concerned with climate and weather. We must concern ourselves with decoding the information contours of the culture. How does power function here? How is this system of communications and control maintained? What information is habitually withheld and how? Ought it to be jammed? How do we jam it? How do we keep the action small enough so it is relevant to real people? How do we build up an indigenous data base? Where do we rove and strike next?...The traditional tricks of guerrilla warfare

---

<sup>46</sup> Heidi Grundmann, “Television in Austria, 1955-1987,” in *Revision: Art Programmes of European Television Stations*, ed. Dorinne Mignot (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Art Museum, 1987), 11.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas Davis, “Video Obscura,” *Artforum* 10, no. 8 (April 1972): 65–66.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Davis and Alison Simmons, eds. *The New Television: A Public/Private Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 68.

are remarkably suited for cybernetic action in an information environment. To scan briefly.

Mix “straight” moves with “freak” moves. using straight moves to engage the enemy, freak moves to beat him and not letting the enemy know which is which.

Running away when it’s just too heavy. Leave the enemy’s strong place and seek the weak. Go where you can make a difference.<sup>49</sup>

An unattributed quotation (probably from Ryan) begins Chloe Aaron’s 1971 “The Video Underground:” “I am a cybernetic guerilla fighting perceptual imperialism....Video tape is TV flipped into itself....Tape is metatheater....Tape is feedback.”<sup>50</sup> The German media theorist Götz Dahlmüller described a minimal agenda for an emancipatory television as follows:

The conscious tearing apart of the different areas of articulation (music, gesture, word, action, etc.), the pointing out of ruptures and contradictions between the images and what attaches itself to them and is superimposed upon them, which first makes possible the transparency and possibility for scrutinizing the reality mediated by the media.<sup>51</sup>

The pursuit of activism and antagonism is absolutist; an avant-garde movement self-immolates in an uninterrupted search for purity that finally dissolves into nihilism. The Situationist International member Raoul Vaneigem embodies this in his description of the impulse to interrupt the televisual flow when he asked, “Haven’t you ever felt like...putting your foot through the television?”<sup>52</sup> Just as the utopian promise partly triggered by the new access to video technology produced a surge of

---

<sup>49</sup> Paul Ryan, “Cybernetic Guerrilla Warfare,” *Radical Software* I, no. 3 (Spring 1971): 1.

<sup>50</sup> Chloe Aaron, “The Video Underground,” *Art in America* 54, no. 3 (May 1971): 74.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Forward by Miriam Hansen, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (1972, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 99.

<sup>52</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle, Intended to Be Discussed, Corrected, and Principally, Put into Practice without Delay*, trans. Paul Sharkey Ratgeb, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/all/en/display/121> (accessed May 8, 2006).

radicalized optimism about the artist's, filmmaker's, and activist's ability to disrupt and tear apart the institutional structures of mass media, so too did it inevitably produce its critics, and in their criticism emerges the agonism described by Poggioli. The avant-garde will pay the ultimate price in the service of the greater good of cultural progress—if the cost of influencing the future is one's own destruction, the avant-garde is fully prepared to pay it. This masochistic impulse informs what Poggioli calls the agonistic phase: an avant-garde movement will wallow in the muck of its own downfall, morbidly convinced that this act defines its supreme fulfillment. Daniels' argument that the high-low distinction never took hold in television echoes the view that emerged following the disappointments experienced by the failures to change broadcast television. Pincus-Witten voiced his frustration with "certain assumptions of the founding figures of the video movement, the most dangerous of which, either stated or unstated, is the utopian myth of the Future..."<sup>53</sup> In 1970 the German artist Wolf Vostell observed that:

[i]t would be important to be able to use the media—television, for example—for this might lead to us having a larger audience today. However to date it has been impossible to get a program slot, for example, to create a TV happening; that is, not to show something that is already happening on television, but to work with the medium of electronic television signals with millions of people. We don't need program time to show our works, we want to do something with the medium of electronics, with the channels of information.<sup>54</sup>

Ten years after the period I am interested in, in 1988, Raymond Bellour and Anne-Marie Duguet write that video art has become: "the accomplice, negative, and

---

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Simmon and Davis, 69.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Wulf Herzogenrath, "Video Art and Institutions: The First Fifteen Years," in *40 yearsvideoart.de—Part I Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 Until the Present*, eds. Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 25.

obverse side of television: both its echo chamber and its challenge” (my

translation).<sup>55</sup> And in 1992 Bill Viola begins a statement with the following assertion:

I do not accept the category of “television art.”...To say that it has a special case called “television art” is to accept the political consequences of commercial television’s present hegemony (particularly in America) over the full spectrum of imagery representing...the full range of human experience on this planet.<sup>56</sup>

An artist who first emerged in the late 1970s, Viola illustrates in his essays the trajectory from activism to agonism that describes efforts to make “television art.”

In their failure to “provide a lasting cultural asset to be preserved for future generations,” avant-garde experiments with broadcast television in the 1960s and 1970s embody a transitory concept of modernity. Furthermore, while avant-garde television emerged for only a brief period of time, its influence on the underlying principles of later forms of moving-image art has been considerable. Even while bemoaning its failure, the history of these attempts to establish avant-garde television has been well documented in the United States as well as Europe. Seminal compilations such as *Video: The New Wave* (1973) provide overviews of the then-emerging field of experiments with television broadcasting, including examples of guerrilla television and “television vérité” documentaries and early explorations with broadcast image-processing and synthesis, as well as experimental performance television. Michael Shamberg (a founder of the video collectives Raindance

---

<sup>55</sup> “L’art vidéo poursuit de toute façon un débat interminable et fondamental avec la télévision...Il devient ainsi l’accomplissement, le négatif et le revers de la télévision: à la fois sa chambre d’échos et sa mise en question.” Raymond Bellour and Anne-Marie Duguet, “La Question Vidéo,” *Communications* no. 48 (1988): 5.

<sup>56</sup> Bill Viola, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings 1973-1994*, ed. Robert Violette, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 211.

Corporation and then Top Value Television) published *Guerrilla Television*. A booklength manifesto, it outlined a technological radicalism, claiming that through its mass audience, commercial television had become a conditioning agent rather than a source of enlightenment.<sup>57</sup> For Shamberg, video offered the means to “decentralize” television so that a Whitmanesque democracy of ideas, opinions, and cultural expressions could be made both by and for the people, and then “narrowcast” on cable television.<sup>58</sup> Gene Youngblood’s 1970 *Expanded Cinema* is a prescient study of the evolution of cinematic language through new technological extensions. He concentrates on the advanced image-making technologies of computer films, experimental television, laser movies, and multiple-projection environments. Of special interest is the section “Television as a Creative Medium,” where Youngblood discusses the revolutionary implications of then-ongoing experiments with television. The proceedings of “Open Circuits: The First International Conference on the Future of Television” at the Museum of Modern Art (1974) were published as *The New Television: A Public/Private Art* in 1977. A definitive moment for both avant-garde television and video art in the United States, these proceedings brought together the most important players trying to enter broadcast television. The problem of independent videomakers was a primary topic at this conference. In *The Five Myths of Television Power; Or Why the Medium Is Not the Message*, Douglas Davis, one of

---

<sup>57</sup> Shamberg went on to establish a successful career in mainstream media, first as a Time-Life correspondent, then as a film producer. His credits include *Garden State* (2004), *Erin Brockovich* (2000), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988).

<sup>58</sup> The introduction of cable television, while an important second act in the relationships between institutions, the avant-garde and broadcast television, will not be considered in this chapter for the purposes of brevity.



the period's more important figures in the United States, sets out the love hate relationship toward television. Deirdre Boyle's *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* charts the history of the new forms of documentary that developed out that period. Finally, in publications such as *Afterimage* and other similar publications artists such as Martha Rosler, video critics such as Martha Gever and scholars such as Marita Sturken published extensively on avant-garde television. Numerous exhibitions also mark this period: of note is the 1987 *Revision: Art Programmes of European Television* organized by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It provides invaluable summaries and programming information on experimental television in European countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, as well as West Germany and France. Recent publications such as Rudolf Frieling and Dieter Daniels' *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*, as well as Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath's *40Yearsvideoart.de Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 to the Present*, provide a sorely needed, albeit partial, look at West German avant-garde television. As part of a longer trajectory, they provide a fuller, more coherent account than previously available in English of West German television's brief relation with artists and filmmakers. Gareth James and Florian Zeyfang's anthology *I Said I Love. That is the Promise: The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard* looks at Godard's television and video. A significant body of work, his television and video projects have historically been ignored, to avoid threatening Godard's position as a *cineaste*. Both the book and the exhibition it grew out of distinguish three ways in which Godard has negotiated his relation to

television and video: by anticipating the potential of video technology and the broadcast image, by participating in the development of a utopian-reformist way, and by imploding the reformist drive from a postreformist perspective. Finally David Joselit's *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* looks at the lost future imagined by the 1960s and 1970s radical programming, which was aimed at broadcast television by a burgeoning counterculture of experimental video. The "feedback" of his book's title refers, in part, to the distortion that renders inoperative electronic communications technology, such as the television monitor, when it is turned to face its brother, the video camera. When Joselit writes about a never-to-be-realized future, he is also proposing an alternative history of television networking, commoditization, and spectatorship. This alternative history acts as feedback to our present moment.

This chapter contributes the following. First, it focuses on the utopianism that made imagining such a lost, parallel future possible by underwriting the critical, sporadic steps taken by institutions to support and facilitate the entry of the avant-garde into television. As Joselit stresses in his book, efforts to effect significant change to television as an institution were finite in terms of duration and success, and stories of these failures describe a revolutionary—or oppositional—structure of idealism. By examining 1960s and 1970s institutional infiltrations in three different countries, this chapter privileges the ideological formations underwriting these attempts. It also emphasizes how such infiltrations of these institutions, or the commercial broadcast networks and the public broadcasting systems in the United States, West Germany, and France. The central paradox it explores is the following:

in order to reproduce the formal failures, or audiovisual stammers brought about by inadvertent or catastrophic interruptions on and for television described at the outset of this chapter, artists, filmmakers, and activists required a substantial degree of cooperation and support from the mass-media institutions they were setting out to overturn. By foregrounding this paradox this chapter demonstrates the gap between what these individuals and institutions were and what they might have been.

Furthermore, it contends that the outburst of transitory modernism that emerges at this critical juncture inadvertently continues the project of television executives from the 1940s and the 1950s into the avant-garde world: separating mass media from democracy, the audience from the masses. This has consequences for the later emergence of video art, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

The types of institutional support emanating from government, private, and educational interests, as well as resistance to these interests, are central to the formation of avant-garde television. That institutions were primed to support certain forms of avant-garde television is evident not only through the earlier accounts I have referred to but also through the writings of another former FCC chair, Nicholas Johnson. In the introduction to *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*, Johnson wrote, “Television is one of the most powerful forces man has ever unleashed upon himself. The quality of human life may depend enormously upon our efforts to comprehend and control that force.”<sup>59</sup> For Johnson, however, “most significant of all, citizens of all ages, in all corners of this country, have begun to grasp the absolutely

---

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Johnson, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 3.

crucial need to reform television if any progress is to be made on the rest of our national agenda.”<sup>60</sup> Unexpected reformers join forces through desires, orientations, ideologies, and historical events as diverse as the May 1968 student uprisings in France, the mix of private and public institutional infrastructures for broadcast television established by individual nation-states, the New Left, a McLuhanesque faith in the progressive power of technology, and conceptualism’s interest in the dematerialization of the art object. In particular, this chapter looks at the role played by the Rockefeller Foundation in establishing video art as a medium in the United States; the consequences for avant-garde broadcast television of the electronic music studio that was sponsored by WDR III Cologne, West Germany; and Godard’s place at the nexus of film, television, and the May 1968 revolution in France.

## **1.2 The Rockefeller Foundation and the Public Broadcasting Service**

To make sense of the relation between the Rockefeller Foundation and PBS requires a close look at the early phase of Nam June Paik’s career. Paik’s path leads from studying classical music in Korea and Japan to discovering Arnold Schoenberg, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and John Cage, to developing through these composers an interest in electronic music, to working with electronic images. In the early 1960s Paik was based in Cologne. At the time, one of the cultural epicenters of artistic experimentation near Cologne was Wuppertal. Beginning in 1949, the art patrons Anneliese Jährling and Rolf Jährling regularly invited artists to their nineteenth-century villa in Wuppertal, otherwise known as the Parnass Gallery. In 1963, they

---

<sup>60</sup> Johnson, 5.

extended an invitation to Paik. Between March 11 and 20, he converted the entire house from attic to basement, from bathroom to garden, into an installation. Four prepared pianos, several disc and tape installations, mechanical sound objects, and a freshly slaughtered ox's head hung above the entrance all formed part of the exhibition, which was only open for two hours a day from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

"Prepared" television sets with variously distorted images were scattered around one room on the ground floor. A detailed account of the television installation comes from Fluxus artist Tomas Schmidt, who helped set it up, explained that there were

eleven televisions in the room between the hall and the garden; arranged—like the pianos—at random; one TV set is on top of another, the others are on the floor. The starting material is supplied by the normal TV programmes, but they are scarcely recognizable on most of the sets....one of the TV sets shows a negative picture overlaid with a different one. The picture on another has been rolled up, so to speak, into a cylinder round the vertical centre axis of the screen. In what Paik calls the most complicated case there are three independent sinusoidal oscillations attacking the image parameters. The group of two: the lower one has horizontal stripes, the upper one vertical stripes (the upper one actually shows the same picture as the bottom one, but is on its side as opposed to its feet). A single, vertical, white line runs through the middle of the screen of the "zen tv." One set lies down and shows its picture to the parquet floor (Paik said today: "that one was broken"). In the top eight TV sets the picture composition (in television, the term picture also includes a temporal dimension) is derived from the more-or-less predefined manipulation of the set's electronics, in the four bottom sets the manipulation is such that external influences determine the picture: one of the four is connected to a pedal switch in front of it; if you press the switch, the short-circuits of the contact procedure brings about a fireworks of instantly disappearing points of light on the screen. Another set is hooked up to a microphone; anyone who speaks into the mike sees an explosion of dots similar to the other set, but a continuous one this time. The "kuba tv" is the most extreme; it is connected to a tape recorder that feeds music to the TV (and to us): parameters of the music determine parameters of the picture. Finally (on the top storey) you have the "one point TV" that is connected to a radio; in the middle of the screen is a bright point whose size is governed by the current volume of the radio; the

louder the radio, the larger the point, the quieter the radio, the smaller the point becomes.<sup>61</sup>

The rich detail in this description of Paik's television laboratory demonstrates the possible manipulations of the broadcast image open to a home audience, albeit one with the necessary technical knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

Daniels points out that the short evening hours of the exhibition were timed to coincide with the brief, two-hour broadcast day of the only German television channel operating at the time.<sup>63</sup> That was the only time a (modified) image, could be seen on Paik's television sets, demonstrating how important these experiments with television—scarcely acknowledged at the time by visitors and the press—were to Paik.<sup>64</sup> At this early stage, Paik explicitly links broadcasting to his prepared televisions, which were intended to give back to the broadcast audience a measure of control over the images they received. His work on audience-driven “interference” continued to evolve: in a letter to the New School for Social Research written in 1965, Paik envisioned a synthesizer as an intermediary instrument “which anyone

---

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Daniels, “Television—Art or Anti-art?” 63.

<sup>62</sup> Like radio, analog television and video produces sound, as well as images, through a series of changing electrical modulations. In a black-and-white television, an electron beam maps an image onto a phosphor-coated screen by scanning across the phosphor one line at a time. To produce an image that fills the entire screen, the electron beam produces a raster scan pattern: a line scans across the screen from left to right, moves back to the left side, down slightly and across another horizontal line, and so on down the screen. When the beam reaches the right side of the bottom line, it moves back to the upper left corner of the screen. As the beam of light moves from left to right, its intensity is modulated into shades of black, gray, and white. Because the lines are spaced very closely together, they are perceived as a single image. These electronic frequencies, in turn, are broadcast over long distances on frequencies along a bandwidth (the range of frequencies occupied by a modulated carrier wave), which is measured in megahertz. A typical black and white television signal requires 6 MHz of bandwidth.

<sup>63</sup> Coincidentally, shortly after the exhibition closed, or on April 1, 1963, the second German television station—ZDF—began broadcasting, thus allowing viewers a choice for the first time. Until that moment, the only alternative open to German viewers for interacting with their televisions was the on-off switch.

<sup>64</sup> Daniels, “Television—Art or Anti-art?” 62–63.

could use in his own home, using his increased leisure to transform his television set from a passive pastime [sic] to active creation.”<sup>65</sup> “Communication,” writes Paik elsewhere,

means the two-way communications. One-way communication is simply a notification ...like a draft call. TV has been a typical case of this non communication and [the] mass audience had only one freedom, that is to turn on or off the TV.... My obsession with TV for the past 10 years has been, if I look back and think clearly, a steady progression towards more differentiated participation by viewers.<sup>66</sup>

Paik’s vision of “differentiated participation” becomes more clearly defined later in the decade, after he started to receive sustained technical and funding support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

The mandate of the Rockefeller Foundation was in part an outcome of the ideals established in the 1930s at the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research. Founded in 1901, the Rockefeller Institute brought together scientists to intensively research ways to combat diseases such as malaria, scarlet fever, and to promote the Green Revolution (in which high-yield crops were cultivated through advances in chemistry). The formalization of an arts program did not take place until 1963, and the Rockefeller Foundation began funding film, and then experimental television, in the mid-1960s. In the 1960s, the Director of Arts was Norman Lloyd, followed by Howard Klein, who served as Director from 1973-83. Lloyd and Klein explicitly modeled their arts funding on the history and philosophy of the Rockefeller Foundation. As Klein stated in an interview with Sturken, “What I did was come to

---

<sup>65</sup> Paik to the New School for Social Research, no date (year indicated in a textual annotation), “Projects for Electronic Television,” in *Videa ‘n’ Videology*, ed. Judson Rosebush, (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1974).

<sup>66</sup> Sonsbeek catalog, 1971, in Rosebush.

the organization, get the feeling of it, the spirit and the history, and say, “Okay, how do you think that way in the arts?”<sup>67</sup>

Klein’s and Lloyd’s decisions to support Paik were based on his experiments with television, rather than his more firmly established reputation as an avant-garde musician. In a report of an interview with Allan Kaprow and Paik, Klein wrote,

NJP is obviously brilliant. He is artistically sensitive and may be years ahead of his generation. He is John-Cage inspired but seems more concerned with the product than the method. He said, “Why must we have more electronic music studios like Stockhausen’s of twenty years ago and not have even one electronic painting studio?” I can’t assess his potential value to art—who can? But here is a dedicated pioneer caught in the usual economic squeeze and made to suffer because of his daring originality. I would recommend we find some way of supporting his work.<sup>68</sup>

Paik’s reference to Karlheinz Stockhausen’s electronic music studio, which was set up in WDR III Cologne, describes the model that producers of avant-garde broadcast television grew to aspire to in the United States and West Germany. Stockhausen was a German composer, considered to be one of the most important and controversial of the twentieth century. Robin Maconie’s account of the studio’s founding draws out the institutional links that emerged among scientific research, cold war politics, and a new creative center for avant-garde music. As Maconie writes, in the early 1950s Werner Meyer-Eppler and Robert Beyer of Bonn University’s Institute of Information Science were part of an international team of researchers studying speech recognition and automatic translation. Their research continued wartime code-breaking into the

---

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Marita Sturken, “Private Money and Personal Influence: Howard Klein and the Rockefeller Foundation’s Funding of the Media Arts,” *Afterimage* 14, no. 6 (January 1987): 9.

<sup>68</sup> Report of interview between Howard Klein, Allan Kaprow and Nam June Paik, August 10, 1967 “SUNY—Stony Brook, Nam June (Video Artist), 1967-68,” box 423, series 200R, Record Group 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York (hereafter designated RAC).



cold war: making it possible for new electronic and computing technologies to intercept and translate radio and telephone voice messages automatically. It also developed real-time speech recognition and translation hardware and substitution software instrumental to the deliberations of the newly founded United Nations.<sup>69</sup> Like many information scientists, Meyer-Eppler and Beyer used tone and melody analysis and synthesis as an entry into the more complex problems of speech recognition. Their initial experiments attracted the attention of Herbert Eimert at WDR Cologne Radio, who then collaborated with them to establish an electronic music studio. Its mission was to develop and put into practice complex tone analysis and synthesis that might also contribute to the emergence of new arts for radio. Stockhausen's 1971 account of the studio's establishment describes a series of collaborative relationships among academic researchers, radio programmers, technicians, and station executives:

We were intimately acquainted with...the first sound experiments at Bonn University in 1951 of Dr. Meyer-Eppler, the phoneticist and expert in communications. He had made contact with Dr. Herbert Eimert (who was then in charge of the late evening New Music programme of the Cologne Radio...) and his friend Robert Beyer (reader of new music at WDR Cologne)....In 1952 Dr. Eimert persuaded Hanns Hartmann, then head of WDR, to make a normal music studio available for two hours, twice weekly, together with a technician (first Bierhals, then Heinz Schiitz), so that Eimert and Beyer could conduct acoustic experiments....I was engaged as the first regular assistant at the newly-founded "electronic music studio" of WDR, Beyer withdrew, and Eimert became director of the studio....great credit in the evolution of electronic music is due to Herr Enkel, a technical director of WDR in Cologne....he succeeded in making available the money for setting up the

---

<sup>69</sup> Robin Maconie, "Stockhausen at 70: Through the Looking Glass," *The Musical Times*, 139, no. 1863 (Summer 1998): 6.

world's first electronic studio out of WDR's technical budget. (The sum was enormous at the time-I heard a figure of 120,000DM mentioned).<sup>70</sup>

This relationship between WDR Cologne Radio and Stockhausen formed a precedent for the Rockefeller-Paik relationship that developed after Paik came to the United States and was under the wing of the Rockefeller Foundation.

With little or no support from the art market, the Rockefeller Foundation was instrumental in forging the direction taken by the U.S. experimental-video community. As Sturken observed, Klein's decision to "look at public television and the role it could play in support of the arts..." was a response to lobbying efforts by Paik and others, or artists "who were clamoring to get on the airwaves."<sup>71</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation funded Paik with small and timely grants: first with a \$550.00 allocation for living expenses in August 1967, and then with a more substantial grant of \$13,750 made out to SUNY Stony Brook and meant to pay Paik's salary for a residency at the Institute for Experimentation in the Arts for 1967-68. This residency was made possible through the recommendation of Allan Kaprow, who was at the time a professor at Stony Brook. The mission of the institute was to bring professional artists together with scientists, as well as experts from other fields, in order to provide primary and secondary school students with a holistic education.

As the Consultant for Experimental Art at the new Instructional Resources Center at Stony Brook, Paik proposed the Utopian Laser TV Station: "Very, very, very high-frequency oscillation of lasers will enable us to afford thousands of large

---

<sup>70</sup> Karlheinz Stockhausen, "The Origins of Electronic Music," *The Musical Times*, 112, no. 1541. (July 1971): 649-650.

<sup>71</sup> Sturken, "Private Money and Personal Influence," 9.

and small TV stations. This will free us from the monopoly of a few commercial TV channels.”<sup>72</sup> A sample program schedule includes the following:

7am: Chess lesson by Marcel Duchamp  
8am: Meet the Press. Guest, John Cage  
9am: Morning gymnastics, Merce Cunningham, Carolyn Brown, etc.<sup>73</sup>

In his first report to the Rockefeller Foundation, “Expanded Education for a Paperless Society,” Paik proposed that the new television station function as a global university. To this end, he envisioned that it would operate as a central clearing house for unpublished musical scores and unpublished electronic music. Moreover, he recommended that visual and aural records made of living artists and philosophers such as Marcel Duchamp, Martin Heidegger, and Bertrand Russell, and that, in making these records, “[t]he interviewer should be a qualified philosopher himself and the camera crew as minimal as possible, so that Jaspers [sic] or Heidegger can talk as naturally as *Chelsea Girls*.” This station would thus operate as a “video ersatz,” designed for instructional purposes.<sup>74</sup>

*Global Groove* was to be the pilot program for the Utopian Laser TV Station. Befitting the utopianism implied in the station’s title, its planned launch date was set for March 1, 1996. The similarity between the title and contents of the pilot and Marshall McLuhan’s “global village” is not coincidental. Paik not only echoed McLuhan’s pronouncement that the artist prophesizes the “message of cultural and

---

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Jud Yalkut’s “Electronic Zen: The Underground TV Generation,” *Westside News*, August 10, 1967; “SUNY—Stony Brook, Nam June (Video Artist), 1967-68,” box 423, series 200R, Record Group 1.2, RAC.

<sup>73</sup> Nam June Paik, “Utopian Laser TV Station,” *Radical Software* 1, No. 1, Spring 1970: 14.

<sup>74</sup> Nam June Paik, “Expanded Education for the Paperless Society,” *Radical Software* 1, No. 1, Spring 1970: 7.

technological challenges decades before the transformational effect occurs” but also extended it: “We [artists] also have output capacity....My job is to see how the establishment is working and to look for holes where I can get my fingers in and tear away walls.”<sup>75</sup> In this characterization the television artist becomes a subversive agent, a social critic, and a visionary. The pilot opens with a typically euphoric quotation by Paik over a shot of a *TV Guide*: “This is a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow when you will be able to switch on any TV station on earth, and TV guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.” Paik’s introductory statement establishes the pilot’s compositional principle and its message: global channel surfing:

If we could compile a weekly TV festival made up of music and dance from every county, and distribute it free-of-charge round the world via the proposed common video market, it would have a phenomenal effect on education and entertainment.<sup>76</sup>

As the anonymous author catalogue entry for *Global Groove* in the Electronic Arts

Intermix catalogue observes, Paik

subjects the transcultural, intertextual content to an exuberant, stream-of-consciousness onslaught of disruptive editing and technological devices, including audio and video synthesis, colorization, ironic juxtapositions, temporal shifts, and layering.<sup>77</sup>

The pilot’s narrative is held together by recurring clips of dancers performing across a synthesized, colorized space to Mitch Ryder’s *Devil with a Blue Dress On*. The clips

---

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, “Profiles: Video Visionary,” *The New Yorker* 51, no. 11 (May 5, 1975): 79.

<sup>76</sup> Nam June Paik, “*Global Groove* and Video Common Market,” in *Nam June Paik: Video ‘n’ Videology, 1959-1973*, ed. Judson Rosebush (Syracuse: Emerson Museum of Art, 1974).

<sup>77</sup> Anonymous, “*Global Groove*,” *Artists’ Video: An International Guide*. Lori Zippay, ed. (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1991), 157.

are intercut with traditional Korean dancers. Both dance sequences are intermittently superimposed over densely layered collages of television programs. The dance sequences are in turn interleaved with fragments of performances by The Living Theater (*Paradise Now*), John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, and Stockhausen (*Kontakte*). Also featured are fan dances; Pepsi commercials appropriated from Japanese television; recycled excerpts of earlier works by Paik including *Ginsberg Audrich*, *Tribute to Anonymous Beauty*, *Meta-Media*; and work by other video artists such as Jud Yalkut and Robert Breer (*Fist Fight*). Paik's frequent collaborator, the cellist Charlotte Moorman, her image wildly synthesized, performs *TV Cello*; Paik and Moorman perform *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*; Richard Nixon's face is distorted by a magnetically altered television (*Electronic Opera #1*). Paik concludes *Global Groove* with the segment "Participation TV," in which he instructs viewers to open or close their eyes, continuing the ideas developed in his earlier installation at the Parnass Gallery, as well as in the letter to the New School.

Paik and Klein saw not only television as a monolithic institution in need of change but also the role of the artist as individual creator as the one with the potential to carry this out. And the place where they envisioned this happening was the newly formed public television network. Klein's application to television and the arts of the broader Rockefeller vision of philanthropy through research and development is summarized in a report presented before the Subcommittee on Foundations of the State Finance Committee. In it, Klein characterizes the Rockefeller Foundation's decision to actively support "the artistic uses of public television" as a strategic

expenditure of their limited funds: “The rationale is simple: television is a medium of communication natural to artistic expression, but which, because of the vast expenses of programming, effectively limits artists access to its studios.”<sup>78</sup> Drawing in part on the model of scientific research developed earlier in the history of the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as the precedent of the electronic music studio at WDR Cologne Radio, Klein and the Rockefeller Foundation conceived of experimental centers attached to specific public stations, which would act as research and development branches for television: “It was discovered in 1967 that there existed at that time no facility where experimentation could be carried on. Programming demands made it virtually impossible for producers to try and find out ideas which were, because experimental, risky in terms of finding future funding.”<sup>79</sup> To that end, Klein and the Rockefeller Foundation provided the seed money for three major experimental television centers—the National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET) at KQED in San Francisco, the Television Laboratory at WNET in New York City, and the New Television Workshop at WGBH in Boston—that would allow artists to work in television stations, with the station technicians. Although Paik proposed *Global Groove* in 1967, it was not produced until 1973 at The Television Laboratory; and it was broadcast on WNET on January 30, 1974.

At NCET, artists and technicians were brought together for a year, after which time they were replaced by another team. Emphasis was placed on pure

---

<sup>78</sup> Howard Klein, “Testimony of Howard Klein, Director for the Arts for the Rockefeller Foundation. Prepared for the Subcommittee on Foundations of the Senate Finance Committee,” 4 “Bay Area Feasibility Study, 1975 box R1501, series 200R, Record Group A79, RAC.

<sup>79</sup> Klein, “Testimony of Howard Klein,” 4.

experimentation geared to advancing technology. The center provided equipment access to a cross-disciplinary group of artists so that they could explore new modes of expression and develop alternative visual languages. Its director, Brice Howard, observed in 1972:

A medium is available. A very sophisticated, complex technology which human beings invested is available to us. It is dumb, inarticulate, contains no magic. It is available and manageable and probably stunningly beautiful when managed by graceful people who are bent on acts of expression ... This newer medium is swift in nature. It demands a new kind of perception. It moves like light sparked into life as through a nervous prism. It is another paint, another dance, another music of sound. Another message meant to catch the quick vision of the inner eye.<sup>80</sup>

A representative example of the work produced at NCET was Thomas Tadlock's *Archetron* (1969). *Archetron* consisted of a complex device that scrambled live, streaming television images, creating a series of constantly changing visual effects similar to those made with a kaleidoscope. "It's a special way of looking at TV....It shows what you watch on the home screen in a new way. I am concerned with the patterns, rhythms and timing cycles that make people watch TV," Tadlock wrote, "the same concerns advertising people have. The *Archetron* gives you an image without the message," a reference to the famous phrase coined by McLuhan.<sup>81</sup> The work carried out at NCET also included innovations in video and audio synthesizers by artists such as Stephen Beck and Warner Jepson, who experimented with the reversals and inversions that occur in musical analogs. A series of thirteen programs was

---

<sup>80</sup> Brice Howard, quoted in "National Center for Experiments in Television at KQED-TV 1967–1975 San Francisco, CA." *Video History Project* <http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/groups/gtext.php3?id=55> (accessed July 16, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in John Margolies, "TV: The Next Medium," *Art in America*, 57, no. 5 (September–October 1969): 52.

organized in a partnership between KQED and the Dilexi Foundation in which artists, including Yvonne Rainer, Andy Warhol, Robert Frank, Walter de Maria and Frank Zappa, were invited to work on and with television.

The Television Laboratory at WNET in New York City received grants from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1971 (\$150,000) and 1972 (\$400,000) toward the costs of establishing an experimental television laboratory. The Rockefeller Foundation provided core support from 1972 to 1976, totaling \$1.1 million, in addition to smaller artist-in-residence grants. The Rockefeller Foundation's flagship center, The Television Laboratory remained open from 1972 to 1984. It administered a wide-ranging artists-in-residence program as well as the Independent Documentary Fund of the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and produced several series for broadcast such as *Artist's Showcase* (1974–1982). A roster of artists—Paik, TVTV, Ed Emshwiller, John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald, Bill Viola, Mitchell Kriegman, Skip Blumberg—produced works at the lab and came back many times as artists in residence. Works produced during these residencies included *Suite 212* by Paik (1975, re-edited 1977), Viola's *Four Songs* (1977), Richard Meyers' *37/73* (1974), and a number of videos by William Wegman from 1973-1974.

The New Television Workshop at WGBH in Boston received a \$300,000, three-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to bring artists together from a variety of fields such as dance, music, art, and drama in order to expand on the possibilities inherent in television. As Fred Barzyk recounts, working from Cagean theories of chance, artists, actors, technicians, crewmen, directors, and engineers were



all asked to step out of their normal functions and to assume whatever role struck them at the time: “The point was to expand the role of accidental possibilities in the act of creating for television.”<sup>82</sup> An experimental television program called “Video Variations” was produced by WGBH in association with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The filmmakers Stan VanDerBeek and Jackie Cassen, kinetic sculptor James Seawright, and cybernetic sculptor Tsai Wen-Ying were invited to visually interpret music from the orchestra’s recordings. At WGBH Paik’s attempt to give control of television to the audience reached the next step with his Paik-Abe video synthesizer. Paik, with Shuya Abe, developed the synthesizer so artists could have access to the processes previously available only in large production studios. In addition, Paik imagined that the video synthesizer could be made available to individuals to use “like watercolor sets [are used in their own home as a participation-creation instrument] today”.<sup>83</sup> The synthesizer made possible the creation of colors, images—as the images recorded by the camera take place or are created—and video effects that could be manipulated and changed in “real” time. The synthesizer made its broadcast debut on August 1, 1970, with a four-hour marathon, *Video Commune*. Subtitled *Beatles from Beginning to End*, it was aired live on WGBX, channel 44, WGBH’s second channel. The images were generated directly from the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer and mixed with prerecorded Japanese television commercials. The Beatles’ music was played chronologically, or “from beginning to end,” with live vocal inserts. During the course of the program, Paik invited people on the street to

---

<sup>82</sup> Fred Barzyk, “TV as Art as TV,” *Print*, 26 (January 1972): 21.

<sup>83</sup> Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future* (New York: Dutton, 1973), 152.

come into the studio and manipulate the synthesizer to create “not cybernated art... but art for cybernated life.”<sup>84</sup> Another example of “live” television, *Violence Sonata* by Stan VanDerBeek, consisted of a live performance broadcast on WGBH with videotape, film, and views solicited from the studio and phone-in audience on the theme of violence.

Alongside the Rockefeller Foundation, early supporters, artists, and activists who were engaged in avant-garde television viewed their work as acts of profound social criticism that were directed at the domination of groups and individuals epitomized by broadcast television. A notable example is Michael Asher’s *The Occurrence of Rolling the Television Program the Tenth of January 1976*, broadcast on the local PBS station on January 18, 1976, as part of the group show *Via Los Angeles* at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Oregon. A camera was set up and locked into place in the master control room, generating an image of the control panels and screen. Also on screen was one of the technicians required to run the master control monitors and cue up promotions for public-service announcements. The literal superimposition by Asher of the spaces of production and transmission gave rise to some interesting responses by the television producers as well as, of course, the audience. In his notebook from January 11, 1976, Asher observed that the technician “keys down his usual verbal activity due to his self-consciousness of being on TV.”<sup>85</sup> Toning down speech was not the only self-censorship carried out by the

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Asher, “Excerpts of a description from Notebook 1/11/76 describing the first run through of a television broadcast delivered 1/18 as a work for the groupshow ‘Via Los Angeles’ at Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland (Oregon) 1/9/76-2/8/76,” in Dan Graham et al, *Video-*

station personnel. Further on in his notebook, Asher comments that the right-hand monitor, which brought in a constant flow of network television, also brought in commercials that the panel operator tried to block from Asher's camera in order to stay compliant with FCC regulations, with limited success: "This could not be controlled...." The program planner's discomfort with the possible outcomes of Asher's work also lead him to bar extraneous personnel from the studio and to set up the trial at a late hour, when only one technician needed to be in the master control room. Asher took phone calls during and after the broadcast to answer any questions from an undoubtedly perplexed audience, as any producer would ordinarily do.

As a consequence of the lobbying efforts by Paik and his supporters, and with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, in the late 1970s the struggle for access to U.S. broadcast television by the public was fought, and for a short time won, in the public broadcasting system. As I state above, public television in the United States had been conceived as a showcase for the arts on broadcast television, as executives and government officials such as Hutchinson, Lee, Weaver, and then Minow understood the arts: symphonic concerts, opera, ballet, Broadway theatrical productions. The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 extended this understanding of the arts when it asserted that television would serve the public interest by developing programming that involved taking creative risks and by addressing "the needs of

unserved and underserved audiences.”<sup>86</sup> Notwithstanding this ambition, the institutional relationship between avant-garde broadcast aspirants and PBS was an awkward one. Its fragility emerges in the internal communications between the Rockefeller Foundation and PBS. In late 1979 and early 1980, a terse exchange of letters and phone calls took place between Howard Klein and Chloe Aaron, who was the vice president of Broadcasting at PBS, which had refused to air four out of six episodes of *Western Exposure*, a series devoted to work by independent videomakers affiliated with the Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC).<sup>87</sup> Klein accused PBS of using the term “quality” as a euphemism to reject controversial programming:

When I was told that these programs would not be recommended for hard scheduling, I was told that there was a problem of “quality,” to which I must frankly say, balderdash. If I were being told the programs were vulgar, obscene, politically sensitive, bizarre, grotesque or too strong for PBS endorsement, I could go along with it, for I understand an organization’s reluctance to back programs whose content may be “controversial.”... Since only two programs are considered “quality” enough for PBS, which I interpret as meaning “safe,” I foresee a negative reaction on the part of funders of BAVC to commit future monies to independently produced programming.<sup>88</sup>

In a followup letter to Aaron, Klein threw his support behind a proposal that was being floated at PBS for the creation of a “red, blue, and green,” network system.

Klein hoped that it would

find a way of loosening up even more the restrictions on programming that limit the non-linear works access while favoring the more linear documentaries. It would seem that the Red network could, in Nam June Paik’s

---

<sup>86</sup> Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as amended Subpart D — Corporation for Public Broadcasting Sec. 396. [47 U.S.C. 396]

<sup>87</sup> At the time a post-production editing facility that also produced limited programming aimed at public television, BAVC was founded with seed money and organizational support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

<sup>88</sup> Howard Klein to Chloe Aaron, October 31, 1979, “Bay Area Video Coalition, 1977–79: *Western Exposure* Series” Box R2055 Series 200R, Record Group A83, RAC.

words, be the off-off-off Broadway of public television and be a place hospitable to artistic work.

Klein saw this as a sheltered environment, ideal for more radical experiments with the public airwaves:

There does need to be a place in national programming for budding artists and geniuses. They need protection and promotion. As a specialist in the arts, I do urge agencies like PBS to provide such protection for them....<sup>89</sup>

The *Western Exposure* series eventually aired in its entirety on KQED.

The placement of avant-garde programming on U.S. public television created a series of unintended outcomes. Since critiques of avant-garde television located the arts inside a protected environment, they were effectively neutralized. Precisely because public television was used as a springboard to launch avant-garde programming into the broadcast universe, these efforts failed to rupture the established relation between mass culture and its producers and consumers.

Consequently, utopian hopes for reform by the Rockefeller Foundation and the artists it supported were relegated to the promise held out by technology. As Benjamin Buchloh points out about Paik in particular, the promise of video contained

the legacy of modernism's attachment to technology as an inevitably liberating force, [and maintains] the naïvely optimistic assumption...that media technology could induce changes inside a sociopolitical framework without addressing the specific interests and conditions of the individuals within the political and economic ordering system.<sup>90</sup>

For Buchloh, Paik's assessment of the interdependence of the institutions of television and the avant-garde never "addressed the political implications of the

---

<sup>89</sup> Howard Klein to Chloe Aaron, January 10, 1980, "Bay Area Video Coalition, 1980–81: *Western Exposure* Series" Box R2055 Series 200R, Record Group A83, RAC.

<sup>90</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, "From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Works," *Art Journal* 4, no. 45 (Fall 1985): 217.

ideological apparatus of television.” Consequently, “his ideas concerning resistance and subversion remained on the level of the anarchic, playful opposition, countering the totalitarianism of the consciousness industry with the transformation of its technology into the gadget.”<sup>91</sup> The McLuhanesque thrust to Paik’s work for television and his lobbying efforts with the Rockefeller Foundation support Buchloh’s contemptuous dismissal, in that they both privileged technological intervention over institutional critique. Nevertheless what Buchloh fails to acknowledge are the contributions of the distinctive structure of the U.S. government-corporate relationship in television and radio and of the avant-garde’s historical mistrust of mass media to the marginalization of avant-garde television.

By being placed on public television, avant-garde broadcast television became part of the broader vision of PBS, which, as the media scholar Laurie Ouellette points out, was “envisioned as a corrective cultural supplement [to commercial broadcast television in the U.S.], and its marginalized role was both legitimated and compounded by its comparative prestige.”<sup>92</sup> In choosing PBS, avant-garde producers embodied the New Left’s broader mistrust of both the masses and mass media. For Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “In the New Left’s opposition to the media, old bourgeois fears such as the fear of ‘the masses’ seem to be reappearing....”<sup>93</sup> Every attempt to enter mass media, Enzensberger suggested, came to be regarded “with

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>92</sup> Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You? How Public TV Failed the People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>93</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media,” in *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and Media*, ed. Michael Roloff, trans. Stuart Hood (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 102.

suspicion as a step towards integration,” toward being swallowed up by the capitalist system. Without underestimating the difficulties involved in directly engaging with mass media, this assumption presumes that capitalism could overcome any contradiction that opposes its dominance or close any rupture that threatens its fabric. Exemplary of this mistrust is Richard Serra and Carlotta Fay Schoolman’s 1973 video *Television Delivers People*, which focuses on the political import of the corporate monopolies of broadcasting and the imperialism of the airwaves. Muzak plays while a text scrolls over a blue background in white lettering.<sup>94</sup> A fragment of the transcript follows:

The Product of Television, Commercial Television, is the Audience.

Television delivers people to an advertiser.

There is no such thing as mass media in the United States except for television.

Mass media means that a medium can deliver masses of people....

In commercial broadcasting the viewer pays for the privilege of having himself sold.

It is the consumer who is consumed.

You are the product of TV.<sup>95</sup>

The message criticizes the medium while remaining within it by using the seductive tools of advertising. Arguments like Serra’s may be persuasive, but this conviction,

---

<sup>94</sup> According to The Kitchen website, Serra excerpted this text from television conference transcripts <http://www.thekitchen.org/MovieCatalog/Titles/TelvisionDelivers.html> (accessed May 30, 2007). The Kitchen is a nonprofit, interdisciplinary organization in New York City that provides artists working in the media, literary, and performing arts with exhibition and performance opportunities to create and present new work. Founded as an artist collective in 1971 by the artists Woody Vasulka and Steina Vasulka and incorporated as a nonprofit two years later, The Kitchen began as a space where video artists and experimental composers and performers could share their ideas.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Serra and Carlota Fay Schoolman, *Television Delivers People*, 1973.

Enzensberger insists, “could easily be refuted historically and is theoretically untenable.” In other words, the question is not whether the masses are complicit in their manipulation but how this form of manipulation represents a certain power structure, as well as how it can be modified.

The distinctions drawn between the “public” and the “masses”—with the attendant implications for each group’s ability to participate effectively in a democracy—were reinforced by avant-garde television and its supporters, as a 1977 petition addressed to the Congressional Hearings on the Telecommunications Financing Act by the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) demonstrates.<sup>96</sup> AIVF advocacy was two-pronged: “to meet the needs of independents and to represent what we believe to be in the interests of the American Public....”<sup>97</sup> Their various petitions to Congress describe a desire to change the structures of mass media to allow new and politically radical forms of video to enter into and change the airwaves. They used “public” to describe the systems of government, foundation, corporate, and audience support that makes possible public, or noncommercial broadcast television. They also defined “public” to refer to the U.S. population, which is organized into categories of public and audience, or, in other words, political force and commodity. Using language similar to Serra’s *Television Delivers People*, representatives of the AIVF argued that

---

<sup>96</sup> The AIVF was another grantee of the Rockefeller Foundation.

<sup>97</sup> “Testimony for Presentation to: The Subcommittee on Communications House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. For Submission to the Record of the Panel Discussions on Public Telecommunications, September 7, 8, 9, 1977,” Foundation for Independent Video and Film [Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers], Conference: 1978-80 Box: R1863 Series: 200R Record Group: A82, RAC.



[i]n television...the product is not the programs. It is not even the products being advertised. The product is the *audience* [emphasis in original]. The market is the selling of the audience....In contrast to the 1934 Act, there is no longer a reference to the “interest, convenience and necessity of the public.” The current bill, in fact, refers to the public as a market. This may have the virtue of honesty. Communications in this country has unhappily become province of a small number of corporate interests....Are we giving up entirely on the public’s role as a participant in the communication process. Of course, there is public television. But whatever happened to *public airwaves* [emphasis in original]?<sup>98</sup>

As Ouellette contends, avant-garde television defined itself in relation to “the presumed mediocrity of the ‘vast wasteland’ and its lowest-common-denominator audience.”<sup>99</sup> In this rhetoric, the Congress, commercial broadcast television, and the AIVF exclude sizable segments of “the public” from the democratic process when, as an audience (or market share), the public collectively makes a choice to watch commercial broadcast television. One outcome of this rhetorical turn is on one hand that, government- or foundation-funded institutions are considered open to criticism for their successes and failures in serving the public, and on the other, that commercial, or private, interests are inadvertently marginalized from these critiques, even though they serve most of “the public.” Consequently these institutions’ constituency, the mass media audience, does not enter into the debate.

James Day, another figure closely associated with the Rockefeller Foundation, reinforced Serra, Schoolman, and the AIVF’s position that U.S. commercial broadcast

---

<sup>98</sup> “Hearings on Public Television, September 27, 1978. Testimony for Presentation to: The Subcommittee on Communications, House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee on the Provisions of HR 13015, The Communication Act of 1978,” Foundation for Independent Video and Film [Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers], Conference: 1978-80 Box: R1863 Series: 200R Record Group: A82, RAC.

<sup>99</sup> Ouellette, 25.

television audience is incapable of participating in the democratic process.<sup>100</sup> In a paper given at an international conference on television, Day focused on the quality of attention that was shaped by the market pressures of commercial broadcast television. Here, the commodification of attention was defined by Day as a national phenomenon. While watching television is critical to democracy, U.S. television audiences, Day argued, are incapable of watching (presumably better quality) television produced in other countries because they have been blinded by “the American system of broadcasting and the purpose it serves.”<sup>101</sup> For Day, the public as audience was disenfranchised from meaningful participation in the formation of democracy because its consciousness had been reduced to a widget in the commodity exchange:

Television has become the national narcotic. So unaware are we of our lowered expectations that we may even sense slight feelings of resentment on those rare occasions when the tube warrants or demands our full engagement—not fully understanding why the resentment is there.

Day’s intransigent and shallowly reasoned consideration of the kinds of attention shaped by the demands of U.S. television producers presumes an unbridgeable divide between public and audience, citizen and commodity, cutting off the U.S. audience from the democratic process. For Day, the solution could be found in the institutional structures of European television: “Even in Great Britain, where commercial ITV competes with the BBC for audience, the firm hand of the government minimized

---

<sup>100</sup> Day went on to become the president of KQED, and then a professor of television and media studies at Brooklyn College.

<sup>101</sup> James Day, “Visual Grammar as a Barrier to International Program Exchange,” in “Television Programming: International Exchange Conference (1978),” Box: R1657 Series: 200R Record Group: A81, RAC, 4.

these effects on programming purposes.” In other words, programming influenced by government control is not driven to attract the largest audience possible. Thus, Day assumes that the quality of day-to-day television programming is innately superior. Consequently, European audiences do not watch (according to Day) television in a “semi-conscious state of receptivity.” Therefore, the audience is better primed for a Brechtian “coming to awareness” of the structures of alienation that are usually glossed over by kitsch. That is, for Day the utopian imaginary so ardently desired by producers of avant-garde broadcast television in the United States was already taking place in Europe, a happy land where benign government oversight presides over mass media, resulting in an actively engaged public.

As Ouellette points out, public television was belatedly conceived in the United States as a corrective to commercial television—thus its history brings different tensions and outcomes to the debate over public service versus market. The distinction between Western European and U.S. audiences, as well as Day’s assumption that European television shapes a form of attention that leads in turn to a more meaningful participation in democracy, is organized around a difference that Day naively assumes is based on the nature of the primary institutional support received by the commercial broadcast television stations these audiences watch. Media scholar Ien Ang has argued, in contrast, that public broadcasting is not necessarily more democratic when it is (relatively) free from market pressures. Public-service philosophy is different from the impetus to win an audience for

advertisers or corporate underwriters but not necessarily less controlling.<sup>102</sup> German and French television stations such as WDR III, Cologne and France 2 are rooted in what Raymond Williams calls a paternal logic, committed to transmitting “values, habits and taste” so as to uplift the populace according to standards determined by the “ruling majority.”<sup>103</sup>

In the early 1970s, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge characterized European television as a series of national institutions caught in a transitional phase between an “exclusively capitalist mechanism” and “effective new forms of public control.” This describes a more complex, unstable set of relationships between government, audience, producer, and commercial forces than imagined by Day. In Negt and Kluge’s analysis, public television embodies a compromise, which initially promised to prevent the assimilation of the viewer into the production logic of television. Ultimately, however, public television stymies the needs and interests of viewers to be directed toward emancipation.<sup>104</sup> Consequently, the avant-garde broadcast television in Europe was unable to fully develop its potential for revolutionary communication. This flies in the face of the rhetoric formed in the U.S. context. For Negt and Kluge, this failure comes about because public television is “confined to the transmission of generalized program material,” or programming intended to appeal to

---

<sup>102</sup> Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 103.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Ang, 28.

<sup>104</sup> Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, ed. Miriam Hansen, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff (1972, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 100.

the broadest possible audience.<sup>105</sup> As a result of this emphasis on limited expression and balanced programming, public television was for Negt and Kluge an institution incapable of supporting the kind of transformative formal, cultural and political interruptions and accidents that were conceptualized by the producers of avant-garde television.

### 1.3 West German Broadcast Television

Given WDR III Cologne's status as the birthplace of electronic music, there was every reason to believe that a partnership between artists and television studios would result in a similarly groundbreaking exploration of the possibilities of broadcast television. WDR III's new Electronic Studio was established to replicate the relationship between radio station and composer by encouraging a new collaboration between television studio and artist. WDR III, Cologne, however, did not build on the precedent established by the Studio for Electronic Music. As Christiane Fricke writes, the relationship was strained from the outset, and initial experiments did not result in sustained collaborations.<sup>106</sup>

The two models of avant-garde broadcast television that were developed at WDR III, Cologne's Electronic Studio—the multimedia spectacle put on by Otto Piene and Aldo Tambellini and Gerry Schum's "television exhibition"—drew on existing art movements such as intermedia, expanded cinema, land art and

---

<sup>105</sup> Ironically, this was exactly the same criticism made about the "big three" network stations in the United States.

<sup>106</sup> Christiane Fricke, "1968/1969 | Black Gate Cologne: Otto Piene/Aldo Tambellini," in *40 Yearsvideoart.de—Part 1 Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 Until the Present*, eds. Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 98.

conceptualism. One of first broadcast “television artworks” (predating the work done at the avant-garde television centers created by the Rockefeller Foundation), Piene and Tambellini’s *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel* (the subtitle translates as either “cinema film” or literally “light play”) produced for WDR III, Cologne by Wibke von Bonin in the new Electronic Studio. Nevertheless, *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel*’s concept was originally developed not as a televised event, but rather as a multimedia live action event, *BLACK Air* that had been staged by Piene and Tambellini in May 1967 in a theater called The Black Gate in New York City. The Black Gate Theater was an extension of The Gate Theater, which had been opened by Piene and Tambellini in 1965 to show underground experimental film twelve hours a day, seven days a week. The Black Gate Theater showcased live environmental multimedia performances and experimentation.<sup>107</sup> A typical live action event by Piene and Tambellini would involve a vortex of audiovisual stimuli, from which a single image gradually emerged. *Black Zero* (1965) began when a giant black balloon appeared out of nowhere, expanded, and then exploded a crescendo of light and sound. A progression like this involved the use of hundreds of hand-painted film cells and slides, which in the case of *Black Zero* were projected over a live cello recital and its audience.

Recreated in a television studio, *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel* set out to reproduce the energy of theatrically staged live actions, using films, slides, inflatable

---

<sup>107</sup> Aldo Tambellini, interview by Barbara Buckner, *Video History Project*, May 10-June 5, June 14-August 14, 1983, <http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/people/pview.php3?id=25> (accessed May 20, 2007).

sculptures, and the participation of a studio audience. Two light sculptures by Piene were used: the audience moved under and around an illuminated ball and an inflatable flower called *Power Flower*, which consisted of more than eight hundred feet of transparent plastic hose and compressed air. Tambellini introduced numerous slide transparencies, as well as seven films lasting from fifteen to thirty minutes and half-inch open-spool videos (which had to be transferred to two-inch television format). Two consecutive forty-five minute broadcasts with different audiences were recorded in the studio on August 30, 1968. The length of the broadcast was criticized “despite, or indeed perhaps because of, its confusing wealth of material”: WDR III, Cologne then cut it to twenty-three minutes.<sup>108</sup> For *Black Gate Cologne: Eine Lichtspiel*, Piene and Tambellini also worked with the technical and electronic possibilities opened up by television. According to Fricke the forty-seven-minute “director’s cut” had some rhythm: it followed a dramatic line, and, if some passages were “image information overkill,” the possibility remained that this was intentional.<sup>109</sup> The narrative flow was created by mixing multiple video sources distinguished by superimposing and interlocking shots from different distances, tracking shots, and zooms; the rhythmic acceleration and deceleration of images and sounds; and the blurring of image information through flickering, exaggerated contrast, solarization, image reversal, or lack of contrast.

---

<sup>108</sup> Fricke, 100.

<sup>109</sup> Fricke, 100.

The broadcast began with an almost static series of images of Piene's illuminated ball in a darkened space.<sup>110</sup> A barely discernable buzzing sound rose and fell. Piene's *Pneumatic Flower* appeared and was audibly inflated. Studio guests were grouped around the sculpture, which began to unfold and float as they and the camera followed it. The superimposed images of this movement created waves of people surrounding Piene's inflatables, which repeatedly threatened to dissolve into illegibility. Overlaying the images the buzz continued, joining ambient sounds of the audience. An electronic rhythm was then introduced. With the crescendo of sound and activity, *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel* reached its first climax. The second sequence started with atmospheric sound and Tambellini's slide show, which began slowly and gradually accelerated. Over approximately twenty minutes, sequences of the guests interacting with the inflatables were intercut with the slides, which layered over a sound that was a cross between an aircraft engine and machine-gun fire. The final image-and-sound sequence consisted of projections on the walls, which showed film and television footage of boxing, news, and police actions. These dissolved into and emerged out of close-ups of individual studio guests, and alternated with Tambellini's slides. The found footage culminated in long shots of the CBS coverage of the horrified reactions that immediately followed Robert Kennedy's assassination. A cameraman in the Cologne studio could be glimpsed for brief moments, zooming in and out with rapid, rhythmic movements. Scenes from Coney Island and an address by Martin Luther King Jr., as well as reaction shots from the studio audience marked

---

<sup>110</sup> I am drawing my description of this work from Fricke's account.



the concluding sequence of *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel*. The tape ended with shots of Piene's illuminated ball.<sup>111</sup>

The main problem attributed to *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel* is its failure to engage with and break down the existing conventions of television. Fricke describes the twenty-three-minute version of the work that aired on January 26, 1969, as an “accelerating bombardment of seemingly chaotic images,” which were in turn described by one viewer as “electronic games without a specifically aesthetic principle.”<sup>112</sup> Daniels also found the broadcast to be a disappointment. For Daniels, “it remains difficult to decide whether the electronic manipulation synthesizes with the intermedia art action, or whether both compete to make the most powerful effect.”<sup>113</sup> Rudolf Frieeling had similar reservations about the suitability of recording a happening for broadcast television, given the fact that spontaneity was intrinsic to happenings or actions. Furthermore, when a happening or an intermedia action such as *Black Gate* was transferred to television, its content was understood to be “part of a process-based situation that demonstrated the media conditions under which television operates.” In other words, just as theatrically staged actions or happenings were sensitive to and dependent on both their immediate environment (the stage, the audience, the interaction between audience and performance) and their institutional setting, *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel* needed to disrupt “television-as-usual.” The most important aspect of this was “continuing to serve mere consumers on the

---

<sup>111</sup> Fricke, 101–102.

<sup>112</sup> Fricke, 100.

<sup>113</sup> Daniels, 72.

(other) side,” a requirement that would be “thwarted [by] the actions in the television studio involving audience and artists in front of and behind the camera as both art and technical directors.”<sup>114</sup> For Frieling, as a happening transferred from the stage to the studio, the work’s success (or failure) was to be measured by viewer “participation,” documented through protest letters and phone calls. Therefore, an action would be “lost,” or disappear, in the broadcast through its inability to “ruffle the monotonous harmony of television consumption.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, for Frieling, *Black Gate Cologne: Ein Lichtspiel* failed because the response of the broadcast television audience was passive.

Gene Youngblood observes that “[t]he psychological effect of television’s totally immaterial nature may be largely responsible for the contemporary artist’s awareness of concept over icon.”<sup>116</sup> One of the more singular avant-garde enterprises in broadcast television was organized by the German filmmaker Gerry Schum. Schum saw the immateriality of television described by Youngblood (and earlier by the spatialists) as a new way to convey artistic processes and concepts that went beyond the object, a conceptual purism that stands in stark contrast to Piene and Tambellini’s “everything but the kitchen sink” experiments. Schum’s collaboration with the institution of television was restricted to broadcasting, financing, and staging something like a gallery opening at the stations. In so doing, he acted as an

---

<sup>114</sup> Frieling, 148.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>116</sup> Youngblood, 292.

impresario, embodying the roles of mediator between the television institution and the artists and of program curator and producer. “In art,” Schum explained,

there is a general change from the possession of objects to the publication of projects or ideas. This of course demands a fundamental change in artistic commerce. One of the results of this change is the TV gallery, more or less a conceptual institution which comes into existence only in the moment of transmission. After the broadcast there is...no object that can be seen “in reality” or be sold as an object.<sup>117</sup>

Schum wanted to use broadcast television as a medium: the broadcasts themselves were to be works of art, as opposed to reports on art. He was first commissioned by West German television to produce a film report *Konsumkunst-Kunstkonsum* (*Consumer Art—Art Consumption*). The program aired on WDR III on October 17, 1968, and was timed to coincide with the second art fair in Cologne.

Beginning in December 1968, Schum launched *Fernsehgalerie Schum Berlin* or *TV Gallery*, which brought the avant-garde into the heart of mass media. The first project, *Land Art*, was developed with Ursula Wever. The works exhibited on the program were to be shown exclusively to a television audience and would not be available anywhere else. The original recording of the event took place three weeks before. It “opened” on late-night television on April 15, 1969 in Berlin and Düsseldorf, as a production commissioned by Sender Freies Berlin for ARD’s channel 1, produced by filmkunstfilm gerry schum. It showed short 16 millimeter films by European and American artists such as Richard Long (*Walking a Straight 10 Mile Line Forward and Back Shooting Every Half Mile*), Barry Flanagan (*A Hole in the Sea*), Dennis Oppenheim (*Timetrack, Following the Timeborder Between Canada*

---

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Youngblood, 292.

and U.S.A), Robert Smithson (*Fossil Quarry Mirror with Four Mirror Displacements*), Marinus Boezem (*Sand Fountain*), Jan Dibbets (*16 mm 12 Hours Tide Object with Correction of Perspective*), Walter de Maria (*Two Lines Three Circles on the Desert*), and Michael Heizer (*Coyote*). The works produced with Schum were, for many of these artists, their first forays into filming for television; few of them continued to work in film or video after the premature death of Schum, who committed suicide in 1973. For Fricke, the aesthetic consistency that marks the work has been “attributed to Schum’s ability to emphathize with the artists’ ideas.” For example, Dibbets’ film, which was shot on the coast of the Netherlands, tracked the progress of a furrow being plowed in the sand: first it was parallel to the left edge of the film screen, then to the right, bottom, and top edges, until the picture frame appears doubled by the quadratic line on the beach. The simplicity and clarity of Dibbets’ film was typical of the films shown on *TV Gallery*, since the film featured “reticent but precise camera work and carefully considered use of the image material” as well as “no shot or camera operations that did not stem logically from the concept...the same [held] true for the sound.”<sup>118</sup> The program aired for thirty-eight minutes, during which time not a word was spoken.

With the support of Wibke von Bonin, Schum succeeded in introducing two additional interruptions into the WDR III, Cologne programming: From October 11 to 18, 1969, the British artist Keith Arnatt, in a work titled *TV Project Self-Burial*, showed a photograph of himself for two seconds, either just after the news or during

---

<sup>118</sup> Fricke, 109.

the prime time broadcast. On each day of the week's broadcast, the artist was shown sinking further and further into the ground. And during the week between Christmas and New Years Eve, 1969, Jan Dibbets' *TV as a Fireplace* showed the slow end of a hearth fire in three-minute segments at the end of the evening's programming.<sup>119</sup>

One other television exhibition curated by Schum was broadcast, *Identifications*, or *II. Fernsehausstellung (TV Exhibition II)*, was screened by the television station SWF/ARD (Südwestfunk Baden-Baden) at 10:50 p.m. on November 30, 1970. In contrast to the less formal atmosphere of *Land Art*, *Identifications* opened with a six-minute address by Schum that included the following segment:

The art object is losing its autonomy, is no longer separable from the producer, i.e. the artist.... We no longer experience the art object as a painting or sculpture with no contact to the artist. In the TV object the artist can reduce his object to the attitude, to the mere gesture, as a reference to his conception. The art object displays itself as the union of idea, visualization, and the artist as demonstrator.<sup>120</sup>

As its title suggests, the program showcased artists investigating or identifying with a chosen object or material. Actions by twenty artists, including Joseph Beuys, Gilbert & George, Mario Merz, Klaus Rinke, Ulrike Ruckriem, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, and Lawrence Weiner were shown. In his segment Beuys sits in front of a television set. A piece of felt covers the television's screen. The sounds of a news broadcast are

---

<sup>119</sup> Of all the formats introduced at the time, the idea of the brief interruption of daily programming has maintained the greatest longevity. Artists like Chris Burden (*Chris Burden Promo*, 1976, in which the artist bought twenty-four thirty-second commercial spots on two New York television channels, channel 4 and channel 9, and twenty-one spots on three Los Angeles channels, Channel 5, Channel 11 and Channel 13), Bill Viola (*Reverse Television: Portraits of Viewers*, 1982), and Stan Douglas (*Monodramas*, 1991), have worked with this form.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Gerry Schum, "Identifications," <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/identifications/> (accessed May 20, 2007).

audible, gesturing to the content that is obscured by the felt; Beuys lifts a corner of it, interrupting the illusion by showing the viewer of the performance a blank screen. Then he puts on boxing gloves and repeatedly punches himself in the face. The television sequence cuts to a second shot at closer range in which Beuys cuts a sausage in half. He then runs the two halves over the screen, similar to a doctor listening to a patient's lungs using a stethoscope. He then cuts one piece of the sausage into a point, and presses the pointed sausage against a wall. Beuys ends his segment by wheeling the television set to the wall and turning it so that the felt-covered screen faces the wall. In Gilbert & George's segment, the two artists are filmed sitting, motionless, under a tree beside a pond in a pastoral landscape. The cinematography follows the pictorial conventions of landscape painting. The short segment consists of a single shot, whose action is restricted to the figure on the left "breaking" into action by drawing on his lit cigarette.<sup>121</sup> Ulrike Ruckriem's segment begins with a tight shot of a sculpture with clearly visible cracks that divide the image. To the left stands Ruckriem, half in and half out of the shot. Over the fifty-five minutes of the sequence, Ruckriem breaks the sculpture apart along cracks prepared ahead of time.

Schum's program both attracted widespread public interest and was doomed from the start, precisely because of the revolutionary qualities of the unresolved contradictions central to his concept: in the crucible of mass media, itself

---

<sup>121</sup> I have not seen these films. My descriptions are based on the summaries of some of the films included in the television exhibition *Identifications* that can be found at: <http://www.essogallery.com/Schum.html> (accessed May 20, 2007). These descriptions were posted to coincide with a group show: *The Theater of Exhibitions (One Work a Day)*, February 26–March 14, 1998, at the Esso Gallery in New York City.

synonymous with consumer culture, Schum and Wever dematerialized art, withdrawing its viability as a consumable product. Tensions between impresario and station came to a head when Schum refused to allow WDR III, Cologne to insert its own introduction or soundtrack over his (silent) broadcast. Schum defended his decision on the grounds that *TV Gallery* was itself a work of art, not a documentation of works of art. Accordingly, its internal integrity needed to be respected. For Wulf Herzogenrath, the questions raised by Schum's project continue to remain relevant: for example, what is the political responsibility of public, or government-run television? Schum answered this question in part when he reinforced public television's status as a one-dimensional receiver of broadcast by using television strictly as a distribution network for his *TV Gallery*.<sup>122</sup> Television stations that chose to broadcast avant-garde television were not, as they were in the United States, marginalized from most members of the population who turned the television on every day. However from the start both U.S. and West German models were institutionally irrelevant, and eventually disappeared. Not until Kluge's partnership with the newly formed private television channels SAT1 and RTL in the 1980s made Kluge a pivotal figure in German media politics—and the producer of three weekly television shows sandwiched between commercials, heavy metal shows, and soft-core porn—would such an incisive institutional critique emerge from the avant-garde.<sup>123</sup> In France, as part of the broader revolt against the government that took place in May

---

<sup>122</sup> Wulf Herzogenrath, "Video Art and Institutions: The First Fifteen Years," in *40 Years videoart.de—Part I Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 until the Present*, eds. Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 25.

<sup>123</sup> For a summary of this partnership see Peter C. Lutze, "Alexander Kluge's 'Cultural Window' in Private Television," *New German Critique*, no. 80 (Spring-Summer, 2000): 171–190.

1968, filmmakers adopted a very different model of radical engagement with television.

#### **1.4 Revolutionary Television in France and Mozambique**

France's broadcasting systems were unified under Vichy government control during the Nazi occupation. After the war, this unified system was reshaped into a mouthpiece for Charles de Gaulle. In the face of an openly hostile print media, and finally embarrassed by broadcast television and radio's fawning support of Gaullist policies, in May 1964 de Gaulle's government founded the ORTF (Office de Radio Télévision Française). An organization modeled after the BBC, it was designed to establish objectivity and distance between the government and the media. This fragile neutrality disappeared, however, shortly after the first student, and later student-worker, strikes, riots and demonstrations that exploded across France in May 1968. Beginning on the evening of Friday May 3 when the rector of the University of Paris called in the police to break up a student meeting in the Sorbonne, by May 24 the strikes had swelled to approximately ten million workers and students across France. While the initial altercations between students and police were reported by the electronic media, throughout the crisis the government-controlled radio and television network offered little and very biased coverage of the riots, strikes, and student demands. On May 25, however, the ORTF journalists joined the general strike.

The massive revolt unleashed against the Gaullist government—and technocratic capitalism in general—did not finally result in permanent change but instead dwindled away into negotiations on the part of labor and the Communist party



for cosmetic reforms such as better pay and working conditions for the various unions. In July 1968 de Gaulle returned to power with a sweeping majority, bringing to a decisive end this revolutionary moment. As Sylvia Harvey observes, the strengths and weaknesses of the May student movement were found in “both its search for a more adequate and more radical analysis of daily life...and its idealistic, often anarchic utopianism.”<sup>124</sup> Despite the defeat, the student-led movement generated a broader reexamination of public and private life. This included the blatantly progovernment bias of the television and radio networks during the first few weeks of May, which backfired, creating a reactionary, and then a revolutionary, response from filmmakers, artists, and activists who started to make their own television. The inflexibility of the government response helped produce a highly motivated and multifaceted attempt to wrest control of the media production away from the government stranglehold. Harvey writes that the “inflexible system of control within the ORTF made any struggle within the institution, around the point of production...impossible,” forcing debate about the principles of uncensored information to take place from outside.<sup>125</sup> The censorship of information forced a sudden and substantial increase in independent and commercial alternative sources of news and information. It also resulted in the establishment of alternative video and television infrastructures.

In post-1968 France, filmmakers and film collectives were ideologically and institutionally well positioned to develop avant-garde forms of television. As in West

---

<sup>124</sup> Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), 12.

<sup>125</sup> Harvey, 8–9.

Germany and the United States, portable video held out the promise of a participatory, antiestablishment medium and, in this way, became a weapon for political activists intent on presenting alternatives to Gaullist television and radio. Among the film collectives that emerged at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s, Cinéthique, Chris Marker's Slon/Iskra, and Jean-Luc Godard's Dziga Vertov Group were undoubtedly the best-organized and most diverse. Part of a collective that included the eponymous magazine published from 1969 to 1985, Cinéthique embodied the 1970s ideals, or theoretical reflections on the role of cinema in the revolutionary effort. The Dziga Vertov Group, which also included Jean-Pierre Gorin, Gérard Martin, Nathalie Billard, and Armand Marco, grew out of the shared belief in the necessity of "setting up a new unit that would not make political film but try to make political film politically."<sup>126</sup> The revolutionary Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov became an avatar for a kind of filmmaking that would reveal the world in the name of the proletariat. Adopting his name, the group's focus was on production, which would determine distribution and consumption. Convinced that political films preached to the converted, members of the Dziga Vertov Group did not attempt to enter the parallel distribution circuits that existed for them but sought new relationships. Video and television were seen by these collectives as essential revolutionary tools, especially in response to and revolt against the overbearing nature of the government mouthpiece, the ORTF. Television was understood as a medium with a completely different formal and ideological structure from film. Portable video

---

<sup>126</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in *New Media Encyclopedia* <http://www.newmedia-art.org/english/glossaire/d.htm> (accessed May 25, 2007).

made media criticism possible for these cinema clubs, which recorded television programs to analyze them and reveal their ideological content. A parallel ideological reading of telecommunications is epitomized by a poster, produced by the students of the Atelier Populaire (attached to the École des Beaux-Arts), showing barbed wire cutting across a television screen and a helmeted policeman speaking into an ORTF microphone with the caption “la police vous parle” (“the police are speaking to you”), referring to the nightly news broadcasts on the state-owned television.

The lessons of May pointed in two directions: toward the individuals and collectives that rose up in response to the oppressive government control of the media and toward the government itself. For the government, it became clear that social and cultural control would be exerted more effectively if some limited support was given to oppositional voices. In 1969, Alain Jacquier, representing the ORTF’s research department, provided equipment for improved taping and editing at the University of Paris 8-Vincennes and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Jacquier also placed video equipment borrowed from Godard at the disposal of the Cinéthique group. The work that emerged from the universities included a video designed as a form of countertelevision, produced in 1970 at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris by Vidéo-Out, featuring Jean Genet discussing Angela Davis.<sup>127</sup> The very government organizations that provided these technical and institutional facilities also met with resistance. In 1970 direct action on the part of students from

---

<sup>127</sup> Information in this section is drawn from *New Media Encyclopedia*, “Chronological Landmarks: The 1960s.” An online publication of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée nationale d’art moderne, Paris; the Museum Ludwig, Cologne and the Centre pour l’image contemporaine Saint-Gervais, Geneva. <http://www.newmedia-arts.org/english/reperes-h/70.htm> (accessed February 27, 2003).

the École des Beaux-Arts, broadcasting from a Montparnasse apartment with two video cameras and a control panel, took the form of guerrilla television against the ORTF monopoly. But more often these experiments took place with tacit or overt government support. The Ligue Française de l'Enseignement taped a neighborhood news program in Bourges with a video camera, and twenty minutes of news were broadcast daily on a "mininetwork." In January 1972 the conceptual artist Fred Forest carried out a limited broadcasting of "one minute of white" on France 2, interrupting the middle of the news on Télé-Midi.

With the necessary intellectual, political and financial resources and at a historically propitious moment, Godard's television work in France and Mozambique, alone and in collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville, shows the limits of institutional support as well as the restrictions of the utopian visions of the radical artists and filmmakers turned television producers. The first published indication of Godard's interest in television predates the widespread distribution of portable video equipment. In the May 1967 issue of *L'avant scène du cinéma*, he disclosed:

Actually, if I have a secret ambition, it is to be put in charge of the French newsreel services. All my films have been reports on the state of the nation; they are newsreel documents, treated in a personal manner perhaps, but in terms of contemporary actuality.<sup>128</sup>

Later, in a 1968 interview in *The Listener*, Godard asserted, "If I'm making movies it's only because it's impossible to make TV, because it's ruled by governments

---

<sup>128</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard*. Eds. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, trans. Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd. (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 239.

everywhere,” an acknowledgment of a barrier unnoticed by Day.<sup>129</sup> While the events of May 1968 contributed to Godard’s “disappearance” from film and his “reappearance” on television, he only fully committed to television after he left Paris in 1972 and set up a production company called Sonimage with Miéville in Grenoble, Switzerland. In a 1975 interview in *Pariscope*, he told his interviewers, “My ideas only get through on television.”<sup>130</sup>

Given the ambitious sweep of his and the Dziga Vertov Group’s agenda, Godard’s failed projects, alone and in collaboration with the group and then with Miéville, provide as much information as the television work that was completed and distributed more or less as intended. In 1967 the ORTF commissioned Godard to film an adaptation of the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s novel *Émile*—a treatise on education—to be shown on television. The work that resulted, *Le gai savoir*, is an essay on the literal and conceptual need to “break down” education. After seeing the raw footage, the ORTF pulled out of the project, and Godard finished it with his own resources. The essay format used by Godard was designed for the intimacy of the television screen. Additionally, by structuring the film’s narrative over seven nights, Godard introduced the pacing of a recurring television series. Filmed in an empty television studio in December 1967, *Le gai savoir* was edited after May 1968 and released in movie theaters in 1969. It consists of a series of dialogues between two characters, Patricia Lumumba (Juliet Berto) and

---

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Colin MacCabe, with Mick Eaton and Laura Mulvey, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 137.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in MacCabe, 137.

Émile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Leaud), in which they set out to develop a rigorous understanding of the relation between politics and film. Patricia is identified as the Third World delegate to the Citroën plant in the North Atlantic, the daughter of Patrice Emery Lumumba and a daughter of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>131</sup> Émile is identified as the great-great-grandson of Rousseau.

The formal strategies used by Godard to stammer, or interrupt television's flow, were first systematically used in *Le gai savoir*: extradiegetic inserts such as interpolated video text, black leader, filmed televisions, slide viewers, slide projections, and sound mixers are all used. As a structuring mechanism of style and rhetoric, this visual and aural stammer destabilized the formal conventions of broadcast television, as well as Godard's and his characters' positions as "invisible" authors. Nondiegetic sound fragments such as radio static and a narration counting off units of measurement ("8,247 frames, 22,243, 72,000, 125,000 ... about 7,500 feet. 127,000 feet") interrupt the television studio scenes on the "first night." Patricia enters, dressed in red and blue, carrying a clear umbrella with yellow stripes. It is her "antinuclear umbrella," she explains. In the dark of the unlit studio, she trips over Émile. He tells the broadcast audience about her, she about him. Patricia announces, "I want to learn, to teach myself, to teach everyone that we must turn back against the enemy that weapon with which he attacks us: Language." "We are on TV," Émile replies. "Then let's go into people's homes and ask them what we want to know," she

---

<sup>131</sup> Patrice Emery Lumumba was the first democratically elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who was deposed, arrested, and, with the help of Western intelligence services, later murdered by Colonel Joseph Mobutu in 1962.

replies. The camera cuts to a frame with the text in capital letters, “SAVOIR” (“to know”), and then pans to black. A montage of street scenes and pictures ends with a cartoon, which “identifies” Godard mathematically with zero.

*Le gai savoir* is Godard’s “semioclastic” effort, to adopt the term Roland Barthes applied to the necessary job of breaking down the signs of the languages we take for granted in order to rebuild them on stronger foundations. The film returns to Patricia and Émile. “Let’s start from zero,” he says. Patricia points out why this is impossible: “it is necessary to *return* to zero first.” “Returning to zero” involves beginning with a rigorous interrogation of all images and sounds, in order to come up with a new cinema that does not use the language of the old. “Images” Patricia continues, “we meet them by chance, we don’t choose them. Knowledge will lead us to the rules for the *production* of images.” The program laid out by the film becomes the program for Godard’s subsequent productions: “The first year we collect images and sounds and experiment. The second year we criticize all that: decompose, recompose. The third year we attempt some small models of reborn film.”

Beginning with *Le gai savoir*, Godard took it as axiomatic that entry into television was only possible within a broader consideration of the economic and ideological divisions of labor. The project was abandoned. The Dziga Vertov Group’s approach to filmmaking was equally, as the following excerpt of a page published in the radical magazine *Politique hebdo* suggests:

During the projection of an imperialist film, the screen sells viewers the voice of the Owner-State. This voice caresses you, puts you to sleep, or beats you over the head. During the projection of a revisionist film, the screen is a loudspeaker projecting a voice that had once been delegated by the people but

which is no longer their voice. The people look silently at their own deformed faces. During the projection of a political film, the screen is simply a blackboard inscribed with the images and sounds produced by the concrete analysis of a concrete situation, namely the class struggle. In front of this screen, the population thinks, learns, struggles, criticizes, and transforms itself.<sup>132</sup>

Through Godard's reputation, the collective secured commissions from the television networks, although these were often later canceled, as was the case with the BBC and RAI.<sup>133</sup> The Marxist polemic *British Sounds* (1969) was commissioned from the Dziga Vertov Group by London Weekend Television (LWT). An audio-visual barrage on the senses, it combined excerpts of Maoist tracts, songs by the Beatles, excerpts from the Communist Manifesto, speeches by Richard Nixon, and Georges Pompidou.<sup>134</sup> In this period, Godard set out to rigorously and self-reflexively interrogates the primary characteristics of his film and television work, trying to begin from "point zero." This took the shape of an onslaught of questions launched at the film or television audience by the onscreen characters, or of interruptions to the film or television that throws its illusionistic space into doubt. LWT canceled its contract, and, like *Le gai savoir*, Godard recycled The Dziga Vertov Group's television program into a film that was distributed through universities, art-house cinemas, and film festivals.

---

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in "Dziga Vertov Group." <http://newmedia-arts.net/english/glossaire/d.htm> (accessed June 5, 2008).

<sup>133</sup> In December 1968, Godard was commissioned to develop a project for Radio-Nord in Québec entitled *Communications*. Several programs, recorded on video, were to be transferred to film for the broadcast; the quality of the result was "deemed inadequate" by Radio-Nord, and it never aired. I have come across as-of-yet unverified references to commissions by German television that were also aired.

<sup>134</sup> From 1968 onward London Weekend Television (LWT) was the British ITV television network franchise holder for London and the South East on weekends, broadcasting from Fridays at 5:15 p.m. (prior to 1982 at 7:00 p.m.) to Monday mornings at 5:59 a.m.



For Godard and Miéville, Sonimage “does not claim to be anything more than a workshop in which one can pose to oneself these problems in a practical fashion.”<sup>135</sup> With this production company, they set out to become producers of both television programs and television programming. They understood Sonimage to be the first component of a new and different distribution system, in which television programs would no longer come from a producer and go to a government- or corporate-controlled television broadcaster. Rather, the television infrastructure would follow a cooperative model, and programming would be available through a horizontal network of producers. Furthermore, they set out to alter the relation between spectator and spectacle, which would be premised on new ways of thinking about the interaction between representation and reality.

In 1975, Godard and Miéville shot *Six fois deux: Sur et sous la communication*, a series of twelve programs for France 2 totaling about one-hundred minutes. Coproduced by the Institut National d’Audiovisuel and Sonimage, it aired in July and August 1976. Its subject was the professional production of television images and how these images influence the way the audience sees the world and their place within it. Two themes that grew out of this subject were the process of communication and labor. The title referred to the primary organization of the series—six sets of two complementary broadcasts. Within each set of two, one show was referred to as a “night” show, the other “day.” In the first show of the first set (1a), *Y’a personne (Nobody’s There)*, Godard interviewed unemployed workers who

---

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in MacCabe, 139.

had responded to a help-wanted ad placed by Sonimage, advertising a job in a private television and film production company. *Y'a personne* focused on the job search process and the notions of employment and of work, or use of time—that is time lost or found or earned—that disappears into daily time.

In an interview with *Cahiers du cinéma* Gilles Deleuze said:

In the TV programs, Godard's questions always engage people directly. They disorient us, the viewers, but not whoever he's talking to....He talks with workers not as a boss, or another worker, or an intellectual, or a director talking with actors. It's nothing to do with adopting their tone, in a wily sort of way....It's as though, in a way, he's always stammering. Not stammering in this words, but stammering in language itself.<sup>136</sup>

The two main interviewees were an unemployed housekeeper and a welder. Godard barraged them with seemingly obvious questions: what were they prepared to sell and buy? The welder was prepared to sell his work as a welder, but not his sexuality as an older woman's lover. The cleaning lady was prepared to sell her time spent cleaning, but wouldn't sell a moment spent singing a fragment of "L'internationale." "Why?" Godard presses. Because she cannot sing? But what if someone were to pay her for talking about not being able to sing? Questions about the artificial divisions between labor and leisure defined another episode, *Marcil* (3b). Marcil, a clock maker, wanted to be paid for his efforts as a clock maker but refused to be paid for his work as an amateur filmmaker, which he called a "hobby." The footage shot by Sonimage showed, however, that the movements he made in performing the two activities, evident first in the clock making sequence and then in the film-editing sequence, were so similar that one could be mistaken for the other. As Deleuze

---

<sup>136</sup> Deleuze, 37–38.

remarks, “[h]e [Godard] doesn’t say we should give *true* information, nor that labor should be *well* paid....He says these notions are very suspect. He writes FALSE beside them.”<sup>137</sup>

“On television, the audience has been invented before the program.”<sup>138</sup> For Colin MacCabe, the central question regarding Godard and Sonimage’s television work is its watchability: in unmaking the “snares of identification operated by systems of signification in which production and consumption are rigorously divorced,” Godard and Sonimage raise the problem of the audience’s pleasure.<sup>139</sup> This conundrum surfaces in response to film, television, and institutions that, because they “[entertain] by erasing, give pleasure in exchange for being [and] hide their own work so the spectator can relax.” Thus, it is difficult “to argue for Godard’s work in film and television, for the knowledge and desire that they incite...is to ignore the problem, less banal than it might appear, of boredom.”<sup>140</sup> Here MacCabe addresses, but from a different perspective, the same issue inadvertently raised by Day’s more simplistic and vicious attack on the U.S. television audience. Instead of dismissing the audience as willingly narcotized automatons, MacCabe interrogates the avant-garde’s refusal of pleasure.

In a very real sense, French national television failed to distribute both *Six fois deux* and another series commissioned from Sonimage, *France/tour/détour/deux*

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>138</sup> “A la television, on a inventé le téléspectateur avant les programmes.” Jean-Luc Godard, “Les années video (1975 à 1980),” *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* Édition établi par Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma-Éditions de L’Étoile, 1985), 406.

<sup>139</sup> MacCabe, 146.

<sup>140</sup> MacCabe, 147.

*enfants*: neither were programmed as their producers intended, in half-hour slots on “regular,” or mainstream television.<sup>141</sup> *Six fois deux* was broadcast on the “alternative” third channel in July and August, when much of the population of France was on vacation and presumably away from their televisions. Similarly, *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* did not receive its half-hour slot; instead, it was set off from the rest of the broadcast day as the work of a famous film director and was scheduled in the late night (11 p.m.) “art cinema” spot, with the three programs every week on consecutive Fridays.<sup>142</sup> Ironically, much of the labor that went into Sonimage’s television refused the authority of authorship. The “we” of collective authorship remained not a silent force whose decision-making processes remained invisible but became part of the critique. The programming gets to the heart of the problems of Sonimage’s television work and its attempts to bring about structural change to the system of media production and distribution.

In 1977–78 the newly installed revolutionary Marxist government of Mozambique granted Sonimage a two-year contract to study, on video, the television needs of the country. With a national television broadcasting system coming in a year or two, the filmmaker Ruy Guerra—recently returned from Brazil to assume the directorship of the new national film institute—approached both Godard and the

---

<sup>141</sup> *Six fois deux* was followed by a second television series commissioned by the French government, *France/tour/détour/deux enfants*, another twelve-part series. In this series, Godard followed two children, siblings, over the course of their day-to-day lives while relentlessly interrogating both their actions and their context.

<sup>142</sup> David Levi Strauss, ““Oh, Socrates”: Visible Crisis in the Video and Television Work of Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville,” *Artscribe International*, no. 74 (March, April 1989): 62.

filmmaker Jean Rouch on behalf of the government.<sup>143</sup> Their mandate was twofold: to help Mozambique avoid the technological and ideological traps of dependency on television coming out of Western countries and to demonstrate the full potential of television to a new nation.<sup>144</sup> As the minister of information remarked in presenting plans for the first phase of experimentation:

We know from the experience of other countries that television determines very high indexes of dependence; technological dependence and political dependence. For this reason, our fundamental preoccupation is to carry out this experimental phase to be able to evaluate to what extent technological and political dependence makes itself felt in a project of this nature.<sup>145</sup>

Mozambique appeared to be an opportunity to develop a broadcasting system from the ground up, with the support of a revolutionary Marxist government. It seemed to offer Sonimage the chance to implement what they understood to be primary questions, such as What image? or An image of what? To prepare the ground for the radical television, Sonimage interrogated what kinds of images would be reflective of the nascent African nation. Their findings would be incorporated into the new, national television system. Working with Carlos Gambo, the official in charge of television at Mozambique's ministry of information, Sonimage was contracted to develop five studies, which were to be shot in video. The first and last were slated to be narrated from the combined viewpoints of Godard as producer and Miéville as

---

<sup>143</sup> Ruy Guerra is primarily known for his innovative work in Brazil's cinema novo movement during the 1960s and early 1970s. Born in Mozambique (a Portuguese colony at the time), Guerra became a left-wing political activist, taking part in antiracist and proindependence demonstrations. After leaving Mozambique in 1951, he studied filmmaking at the IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques) in Paris. He made his directorial debut with *The Unscrupulous Ones* (1962), one of cinema novo's few mainstream successes.

<sup>144</sup> Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 99.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Michèle Mattelart and Armand Mattelart, "'Small' Technologies: The Case of Mozambique," *Journal of Communication*, 32 Issue 2 (June 1982): 76.

commentator. The third, fourth, and fifth were scheduled to be shot from the perspectives of the producer, commentator, and businessman. Godard and Miéville “wanted the viewer to participate in the production of images, instead of being a mere recipient of messages sent by the producer.”<sup>146</sup> With this series, they wanted the citizens of Mozambique to profit from an audio-visual context that predated television, even if only for a period of twenty years, before being inundated by images.<sup>147</sup>

As Manthia Diawara suggests, “maybe Godard wasn’t even interested in producing these images...but what people were expecting...was at least some examples of these images.”<sup>148</sup> In a journal entry in September 1978, following his second stay, Godard described his project:

Sonimage’s proposal to Mozambique is to make use of its audiovisual situation to study television before it even exists, before it begins to invade (even if it takes twenty years) the entire social and geographical makeup of the country...By studying the desire for images and their distribution by waves (or cables). By studying, once and for all, the production, before the distribution takes over. By studying the programs before they become a mould in which the spectators are caught, no longer aware that they are behind the television (being trailed behind) and not in front of it as they thought...<sup>149</sup>

Ultimately, Sonimage was unable to produce the images they were looking for in Mozambique. Godard and Miéville were criticized for the prohibitive cost of the project, which was shelved before year’s end. They produced nothing.

---

<sup>146</sup> Diawara, *African Cinema*, 100.

<sup>147</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, “Le dernier rêve d’un producteur,” *Cahiers du cinema*, no. 300 (May 1979): 73.

<sup>148</sup> Manthia Diawara, “Sonimage in Mozambique,” in *I Said I Love. That is the Promise: The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard*, eds. Gareth James and Florian Zeyfang (Berlin: oe + b books, 2003), 111.

<sup>149</sup> Michèle Mattelart and Armand Mattelart, “‘Small’ Technologies: The Case of Mozambique,” *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 32 Issue 2 (June 1982): 78–79.

In an interview with MacCabe, Godard's responses to questions regarding the failure of the Mozambique project do not pinpoint the precise moment of the project's failure. Rather, they comment on the unattainable nature of a utopian imaginary:

Is there a chance of setting up a different kind of television in Mozambique?

There was a chance. A chance. It's over.

Could you explain that?

It's too far away and the chance is over because it's a country....It's like a possibility. It's rather well-defined in the beginning and then afterwards when you say it's not possible, it was not possible to go on then it becomes difficult to say....TV is too big.

As Godard puts it, the chance for a "different kind of television" may have existed at one time, and it may exist in the future, but it *cannot* exist in the present moment.

While Godard's different kind of television is an ideal state, its failure is nevertheless grounded in concrete conditions. Sonimage was invited to come to Mozambique to help conceive of a television that was based, in part, in a new, Marxist, African nation-state. For Godard, the failure of such a project was the result of Mozambique's status as a nation-state, as well as of the enormity of television as an institutional form.

## 1.5 Conclusion

As Jacques Derrida observes, technology is not merely an instrument for engaging in politics. Rather, without it, the political and the futures it claims to bring forth would simply never emerge.<sup>150</sup> In the mid- to late-1960s, filmmakers, video artists, and activists saw the Sony Portapak as a new form of technology whose development

---

<sup>150</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, trans. Samuel Weber (New York: Routledge, 2002), 56–57.

held out potentially revolutionary possibilities. Around the time of its release, they set out to establish an avant-garde counterpart to an institution that had become synonymous with mass media, broadcast television. The goals for this new avant-garde were no less than utopian: to rip through the tissue of broadcast television's programming, to expose its audience to the ideological contradictions that lay at its institutional base, and to renew democratic expression. Mass-culture institutions such as public television in the United States and government-run television in West Germany, France, and Mozambique temporarily made an opening for those attempting such an endeavor. The emergence and explosive growth of avant-garde television was shaped in the United States by the priorities of supporters such as the Rockefeller Foundation and artists such as Paik; in West Germany through the precedent established by the successful collaboration between avant-garde musicians and government-run radio; in France through the radicalization brought about in part by the complete failure of the ORTF to adequately represent the events of May 1968; and in Mozambique through the unique opportunity presented to Sonimage by the new Marxist government to imagine television at "point zero." Fredric Jameson describes utopia as both a failure of imagination and as something that is intrinsically unimaginable, an "allegorical structure [that] is built into the very forward movement of the Utopian impulse itself, which always points to something other...which always calls out structurally for completion and exegesis."<sup>151</sup> Utopia is no place, and as such is always not only impossible to grasp but also longed for in hindsight. In this

---

<sup>151</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 142.



chapter, I have focused on the failed efforts by individuals and groups to imagine and then realize new relations between the political and artistic avant-garde and broadcast television. Their utopias failed on multiple levels.

One critical failing was Paik's idealization of technology as an element that trumped all others, as a guiding force for positive, transformative change. Negt and Kluge point out that an effective critique of television must "elucidate the connection between television production and the laws that govern production as a whole." Moreover, neither written nor oral criticism is enough: "Products can be attacked only with counterproducts."<sup>152</sup> As Negt and Kluge understood very well, the government's stake in media does not automatically coincide with the imperatives of democracy. In the struggle for control of television, when competing ideological interests emerged between the government and the governed, it did so either as a direct conflict or through the more indirect refusal to let the avant-garde stray outside the confines of "art" and into the mass-media stream. The avant-garde, for its part, maintained an intrinsic distrust of the mass media, the constituency it served—the masses—and the manner in which the mass media provided the pleasures of identification. This mistrust ended up supporting the perception of the mass audience as dupes. Furthermore, instead of producing lasting revolutionary change, it reinforced the unfortunate perception of commercial broadcast television's audience as a body that lies outside of the democratic process, as a "focus group" whose influence on policy decisions is nil.

---

<sup>152</sup> Negt and Kluge, 103.

Finally, this failure emerges in the reception of avant-garde television after the fact. The difficulty of telling its history becomes, in turn, an account in which the disciplines of art history, television studies, and film studies inadvertently suppress avant-garde television in order to remain intact. Art history maintains the dominance of the museum as the primary institution for the avant-garde. As Martha Rosler remarks, “the ‘museumization’ of video has meant the consistent neglect by art-world writers...of the relation between ‘video art’ and broadcasting.”<sup>153</sup> And video critic Martha Gever observes that the disavowal of “the specter of mass media” in art history proves the “inadequacy of video history conceived as art history.”<sup>154</sup> Art history is not alone in its failure to acknowledge the complexity of avant-garde television’s brief emergence and subsequent disappearance: years later Lynn Spigel notes the silence of television studies when it comes to video art as a category when she writes: “It seems particularly important for popular television (and television studies) to engage more with the work being done in video and to think about why video and television (both the producers and the critics) have remained so completely detached from one another.”<sup>155</sup> Constance Penley’s dismissal of art video’s attempt to interrupt television’s “seemingly univocal truth about the world” as a “minor exception” is representative of this failure.<sup>156</sup> “Oddly enough,” Spigel continues, “in the late 1960s art was simply assigned a new word—video—that made it distinct

---

<sup>153</sup> Rosler, 33.

<sup>154</sup> Martha Gever, “Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere,” *Art Journal* 45, no. 3 (1985): 240.

<sup>155</sup> Lynn Spigel, “High Culture in Low Places: Television and Modern Art, 1950-1970,” in *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, eds. Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (New York: Routledge, 1996), 341.

<sup>156</sup> Constance Penley, “Les Enfants de la Patrie,” *Camera Obscura* nos. 8, 9, 10 (Fall 1982), 54.

from television....” Consequently, “in critical circles, the logic of the high and low distinction became wedded to medium specificity arguments....”<sup>157</sup> And film studies retains the place of the auteur by claiming that Godard disappeared when he strayed outside the bounds of film and authorship with Sonimage.

These failures would seem to support Daniels’ assertion that television’s vigorous and highly militant avant-garde failed to provide a “lasting cultural asset to be preserved for future generations.” As Spiegel, Gever, Rosler, and Sturken contends, avant-garde television mutates into video art, and video art becomes the property of the museum. However, Daniel’s observation could be rephrased, more productively. Instead of saying that avant-garde television produced “no lasting cultural asset,” I would continue by asking, What are the consequences of this failure for its descendent, video art? In the following chapters, I consider some of the unresolved “problems” of avant-garde television: the television audience, the shift in institutional context, and virtuality.

---

<sup>157</sup> Spiegel, 341.

## Chapter 2

### Between Distraction and Attention: What Does It Mean for Movement to Be Public?

What does it mean for space to be public?

— Rosalyn Deutsche

#### 2.1 Introduction: “Seeing-In”<sup>1</sup>

In 2003, the art critic David Beech identified a handicap suffered by Jean-Luc Godard’s work, following Godard’s decision to enter television in the late 1960s:

[Culturally,] TV is the poor cousin of the cinema....Movies may have once been an exemplary form of mass culture, but TV broadcasting cemented mass culture to daily routines of everyday life. Leaving the cinema for TV involves adjusting to the pervasively domestic....In short, you can’t make TV without acknowledging...the infelicitous condition of its reception. Cinemagoers are concentrated viewers who volunteer their time, whereas TV viewers are often distracted onlookers whose time you are sharing. Typical forms of attention of the TV viewer, then, will almost be the exact inverse of the ideal art lover (that instructive figment of the imagination who [the philosopher] Richard Wollheim has accurately summed up as an “adequately informed and sensitive spectator”).<sup>2</sup>

Richard Wollheim’s study of the spectator’s experience of painting turned on what he describes as the innate psychological capacity of “seeing-in,” or of perceiving in a painted surface the represented subject, which the surface was understood to be distinct from but to which it could be related. Wollheim accounts for the expressiveness of painting’s depiction with the concept of projection, where the viewer comes to see a piece of the external world as corresponding to an inward state of mind. By referring to Wollheim’s work on the relation between painting and its

---

<sup>1</sup> A phrase used by Richard Wollheim to describe looking at paintings.

<sup>2</sup> David Beech, “Is Godard a Philistine?,” in *I Said I Love. That is the Promise: The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard*, eds. Gareth James and Florian Zeyfang (Berlin: oe + b books, 2003), 31–32.

audience, Beech equates the cinematic experience with a form of attention typically reserved for a work of art, or what Wollheim's "suitably informed and sensitive spectator can be expected to have on looking at the artist's picture."<sup>3</sup> Earlier on, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno described this active engagement as art's redemptive power, which was instrumental to the construction of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> For Horkheimer and Adorno, looking at art required work from the individual. The reward for this labor was a flowering of consciousness: "[Immanuel] Kant's formalism still expected a contribution from the individual, who was thought to relate the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts...."<sup>5</sup> Thus, in bestowing the compliment of this kind of attention on cinema, Beech transfers cinema from the category of mass media to high art. This categorization reinforces Godard's position as an "auteur" director of arthouse cinema, notwithstanding his work in television. It also points to a key element used to distinguish high culture from mass culture, namely the well-informed and attentive audience of high culture.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the culture industry, as an arm of predatory capitalism, robbed the distracted masses of the secret Kantian "mechanism in the soul which prepared direct intuition in such a way that they could be fitted into a system of pure reason."<sup>6</sup> Beech's characterization of the television audience as distracted onlookers also echoes Walter Benjamin's reference to the commonplace and ancient

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Wollheim, "What the Spectator Sees," in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 103.

<sup>4</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (1947, New York: Continuum, 1997), 124.

<sup>5</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, 124–125.

<sup>6</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, 124.

lament that “the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator.”<sup>7</sup> Exemplary of this lament, for Benjamin, was the writer and critic Georges Duhamel’s outrage over moviegoing, a “pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated, wretched, worn-out creatures...a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence, which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope....”<sup>8</sup> Duhamel was railing against the Hollywood cinema audience in the early twentieth century, whereas Beech, as I point out earlier, was writing about television audiences. Nevertheless, these writers’ consistent pairing of attention with art and distraction with mass culture across multiple historical moments and three distinct media (painting, film, and television) is instructive. Furthermore, these correlations between mass culture and its distracted audience precede and follow film. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant defines distraction as follows: “Distraction...is the state of diverting attention...from certain ruling ideas by means of shifting to other dissimilar ideas. If the distraction is intentional, it is called dissipation; if it is called involuntary it is absentmindedness [absentia]....”<sup>9</sup> In discussing distraction, Kant remarks that “the reading of novels, in addition to causing many other mental discords, has also the consequence that it makes distraction habitual.”<sup>10</sup> Not only did novel reading make distraction a habit, it created what Kant described as a “lack of attention to the present,” bereaving (in Gasché’s

---

<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books 1973), 239.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Benjamin, 239.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Rodolfe Gasché, “Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’” in *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), 199.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Gasché, 199.

words) the subject of “self-presence.”<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, the television scholar Margaret Morse binds attention or its lack to specific spatial and temporal contexts when she defines distraction as a state of mind that results from an incomplete process of spatial and temporal separation and interiorization.<sup>12</sup>

Beech’s summation of the broadcast television audience and its daily routine draws on the tradition of critical theory that reaches back to an Enlightenment philosophy of aesthetics. In the light of the work done on television audiences by scholars from cultural studies and television studies, his methodology is also, to put it politely, regressive. Furthermore, it carries forward the one-dimensional caricature of this audience as a semiconscious corporate product that was formed by makers of avant-garde television and their supporters in the agonistic phase of the movement in the mid- to late-1970s.<sup>13</sup> At the time, avant-garde television’s producers and supporters were not alone in their dismissal of the mass audience. Hans Magnus Enzensberger observed that by the 1960s the New Left had reduced the emergence of electronic media to one concept: manipulation.<sup>14</sup> This was ultimately a defensive strategy—behind which lay a sense of impotence—that created no incentive to go beyond attacking existing property relations. As Martha Rosler points out in her

---

<sup>11</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, “Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’” in *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), 199.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Morse, “An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, The Mall and Television,” *Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 202.

<sup>13</sup> Godard’s television work comes from this period, although its response to the television audience is much more complex than Beech’s analysis would lead its reader to suppose. See Colin MacCabe, with Mick Eaton and Laura Mulvey. *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media,” in *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and Media*, ed. Michael Roloff, trans. Stuart Hood (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 95–128.

review of experimental video from this period, proponents rarely explained the defense of creating truly separate spheres for art and commercial culture, which would share only a technological bond: instead, they flatly asserted the escape from commercial broadcast television and its “passive” audience through video art.<sup>15</sup> These assumptions shored up the avant-garde position while cultivating a form of learned helplessness. The remainder of this dissertation addresses some of the consequences that result from the collapse of avant-garde television. As I note at the conclusion of the last chapter, assertions such as Dieter Daniels’—that avant-garde television produced “no lasting cultural asset”—lack heuristic value. By continuing to ask the same sets of questions—How does mass media manipulate its audience? How can art pull the television audience out of the state of stupor it has been lulled into by capitalist programming?—critics of expanded television continue to arrive at the same answers as earlier critics of broadcast television: watching television is escape from labor rather than an integral part of labor. The audience is a commodity. Televisions found in public spaces are contaminants, destroying the pristine spaces of the public sphere. The slack-jawed consumer of expanded television cannot be a full participant in the democratic process. In so doing these critics shore up a position that had already been established.

More recently, David Joselit included avant-garde television in a broader analysis of the art and activism produced on and for network television in the 1960s and 1970s. Joselit turns in part to Fredric Jameson’s model of cognitive mapping for

---

<sup>15</sup> Rosler, 49.



his methodology.<sup>16</sup> For Jameson, cultural objects are the sites of political possibility, or the sites of potential cognitive maps. His political project shows how cognitive mapping provides an escape from the debilitating logic of late capitalism, or postmodernism: “Cognitive mapping [is] the invention of ways of using one object and one reality to get a mental grasp of something else which one cannot represent or imagine.”<sup>17</sup> Joselit set out to map the “differential capitalization” of network television, art, and activism, as well as the “benefits and perils of entering [network television’s] integrated ecology from different points (as artist, activist and guerrilla).”<sup>18</sup> Taking it as axiomatic that there is no longer a position outside capitalism in the United States, Joselit returns to certain events in video at mid-century that ruptured network television and launched counterpublics from within: the artist Nam June Paik’s experiments, alongside televised disturbances by the militant African American organization the Black Panthers, the acid guru Timothy Leary, the yippie collective the Diggers, and the actor and director Melvin van Peebles. Joselit’s analysis of this constellation of counterpublics challenges “current [art historical] methodologies...that...continue to be guided by fantasies of revolution and subversion whose blatant impracticality renders them either cynically opportunistic or childishly naïve.”<sup>19</sup> These methodologies produced the regressive analysis of

---

<sup>16</sup> Jameson asserts that multinational capitalism has created such a complex web of telecommunications, telemarketing and mobile services that the subject becomes mesmerized within the network of the image. This system is so large that the only way to become oriented, to find our social position and class relations in this spatial and social confusion, is to rely on cognitive mapping.

<sup>17</sup> Anders Stephanson, “Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Fredric Jameson,” in *Social Text*, No. 21, “Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism” (1989): 20.

<sup>18</sup> David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), xii.

<sup>19</sup> Joselit, xii.

audiences that I refer to above—in the 1960s and 1970s as well as in the twenty-first century. They are instrumental to the relation that has been consistently established between the attentive audience and high culture and between the distracted audience and mass culture.

As Walter Benjamin has shown, architecture is “received” by its habitual user in a state of distraction. Recent scholarship in television studies and architectural theory has focused on both the presence of television in certain forms of transitional public spaces and the way in which television has informed the form and reception of architecture; urban planning; and the networks of community, transportation, and commerce from suburbs and exurbs to highways and commercial strips. The ubiquitous presence of television and the changes to architecture and civic planning are among the more recent hybrids between electronic media and architecture that I characterize as expanded television. Just as Gene Youngblood described new forms of expanded cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the term *expanded television* I refer to the way in which television has now literally, as well as theoretically, entered into and shaped our public realms as well as our domestic spaces. Some theorists and critics who consider the users of expanded television repeat the spectacular analytic failure of supporters and producers of avant-garde television. They continue to bemoan what they describe as expanded television’s inhibiting role in the formation of democracy, as well as the diminished cognitive capacity of its public. As I show, these analyses are transferred from descriptions of

audiences watching television to the “bad temporality” produced by a distracted public in motion.

Public video art takes place within this new, expanded field of television. In this new television architecture, notwithstanding (or maybe because of) its status as bad public space, lies the unfinished business of avant-garde television. In contemporary public video art made in and for public spaces the divide between good (attentive) and bad (distracted) audiences is renewed.<sup>20</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche challenged received ideas concerning the formation of the public sphere when she asked, “what does it mean for space to be public?”<sup>21</sup> I take up Joselit’s argument that a formal analysis has political ramifications by rephrasing Deutsche’s question—What does it mean for movement to be public? A reading of the public temporality of public video art and its relation to movement turns up the following: First, readings of both modern and contemporary temporalities of the public characterize public movement as both repressive and antidemocratic. What forms of temporality govern this movement? Second, given the intent of high culture to command conscious attention—or, as Rodolfe Gasché puts it, the “self-consciousness of the (bourgeois) individual”—public art has historically turned away from its built-in audience (the distracted passerby) in favor of making an appeal to the more traditional art audience (Wollheim’s adequately informed and sensitive spectator).<sup>22</sup> How would public video art address or incorporate an audience that receives a work of art in a state of

---

<sup>20</sup> By public video art I refer to any video art that is not intended for the museum.

<sup>21</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 269.

<sup>22</sup> Gasché, 198.

distraction, the “infelicitous condition of its reception” described by Beech? This chapter considers how the structure of public video artworks such as Stan Douglas’s 1997 proposal for an outdoor installation in Zwolle, the Netherlands, or Paul Pfeiffer’s *Orpheus Descending* (2001), a work that was set in the transitional spaces of the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center in New York City, take into consideration the distracted passerby. It will contrast them with examples of public video art that take the museum audience outside and onto the street, such as Doug Aitken’s *Sleepwalkers* (2007). How do these works consider the mobile subject that does not stop to look at a work of art? Finally, what insight do these works provide about the conditions of labor and leisure, production and consumption that come together to organize the time forms created?

## **2.2 Distraction and the Television Audience**

The presumed failure of supporters and producers of avant-garde television in the 1960s and 1970s—and supporters and producers of video art from the 1980s onward—to address the relation between broadcast television and its audience becomes more serious with the realization that cultural studies (in the United States and the United Kingdom), as well as television studies, had been hard at work redefining established ideas about mass media’s relation to its public before, during, and after avant-garde television’s emergence. This work begins with Raymond Williams, who points out that in the nineteenth century the phrase “the masses” evolved into the new equivalent of “the mob,” inheriting all of its negative characteristics: “gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit. The

masses, on this evidence, formed the perpetual threat to culture.”<sup>23</sup> James Carey elaborates on Williams’ rejection of the term “mass” as it informed the mass communications paradigm. Carey suggests that Williams thought the label “mass culture” was disastrous, for three reasons:

First, it limits study to a few specialized areas such as broadcasting and film and what is miscalled “popular literature”....Second, the term “mass” has become lodged in our language in its weakest sense—the mass audience....Third, because the audience was conceived as a mass, the only question worth asking was how, and then whether, film, television, or books influenced or corrupted people.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, because of a failure in heuristics, the only question asked of popular media became how it manipulates audiences, as my histories of avant-garde television in chapter 1 conclusively demonstrate. Beginning with Williams, this heuristics of manipulation begins to lose its aura of inevitability.

Williams considered the description of these new forms of social communication, “mass media,” to be not only classist and theoretically limited but inaccurate, since it was “an abstraction to its most general characteristic, that is went to many people, ‘the masses.’” This obscured the fact that the means chosen was radios and television sets placed in individual homes, a method much better described by the earlier word ‘broadcasting.’<sup>25</sup> Williams called for alternative ways of speaking and writing about communications media that would allow for their democratic potential. Along with Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall did not

---

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1958, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 298.

<sup>24</sup> James W. Carey, *Communications as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 40–41.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 16–17.

think of television as an ultimate power source that manipulated a faceless mob's collective behavior and consciousness. Instead, they insisted on looking at what audiences did with broadcast television and how broadcast television formed the means through which people expressed their culture. Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and William's *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) demonstrate that industrially produced media are not simply forced on the "masses" but are used by people as a material source for communication and the creation of communities. Hall's influential essay "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" (1973) provides a theory of circuits and reciprocal relations between media and their audiences.<sup>26</sup> Hall argues that media are hegemonic institutions that work to arrive at an essentially conservative social consensus by absorbing dissent and conflict. Audiences do not all respond to and interpret media texts in the same way. Instead of simply being affected or persuaded by media messages, they "decode" media according to their own social backgrounds and identities. Because of this, audiences do not necessarily accept the dominant ideologies offered in mainstream media.<sup>27</sup>

In *No Respect* (1989), the cultural studies scholar Andrew Ross counters the more well-known, conspiratorial view of mass, or popular, culture with a version of

---

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128–38: an edited extract from Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse," CCCS stencilled occasional paper no. 7 (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> Following Williams, Hoggart, and Hall, many television scholars in the humanities steadfastly refused ideas of the "mass" audience, or an anonymous collective with statistically predictable responses and behaviors. Rather, they took an anthropological approach to evaluate ideas about the audience, culture, and their interrelationships. In 1986 David Morley wrote *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, which demonstrated the value of studying television audiences in the home, in order to understand the way family dynamics can influence the experience of watching television.

Hall's theory of circuits and reciprocal relations.<sup>28</sup> Instead of understanding popular culture as either "imposed on a passive populace like so much standardized fodder" or as "an authentic expression of the interests of the people," Ross pointed out that ambivalence about intellectuals and the role of the expert permeates popular culture.<sup>29</sup> Artifacts of popular culture (his examples include the stand-up comedy of Bill Cosby and the films of Rodney Dangerfield) contain narratives that disrespect and oppose authority, even while providing common-sense "explanations" for the status quo, ultimately, such narratives thus maintain respect for authority. In other words, popular culture neither provides a unified perspective nor, Ross argues, tells its audience what to think. Popular culture, in other words, makes a dialectical appeal to its audience for both self-respect and support for authority. To make sense of this dialectic, the intellectual or high culture must necessarily be involved in any study of mass culture.

In the 1980s, feminist cultural studies influenced the direction of qualitative as well as ethnographic audience-based research on television.<sup>30</sup> By the early 1990s, the major preoccupation of television scholarship was the analysis of audience culture(s), not only within the context of hegemony but also in relation to theories of everyday

---

<sup>28</sup> Because of the U.S. adaptation of German critical theory's *Kulturpessimismus*, Ross decides to use the term *popular* instead of *mass* culture in order to distance himself from, for example, Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982) and Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). While Ross understood the need to challenge the general use of *mass culture* as part of a struggle against cultural pessimism, he also argued that this usage, along with *pop* and *popular culture* often had (and still has), specific or local meanings in relation to production, consumption, philosophy and so forth.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 4.

<sup>30</sup> For example: Angela McRobbie, "Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique," *Screen Education* 34 (1980): 37–49; Janice Radway *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1985).

life. Michel de Certeau's *Practices of Everyday Life* (1984) provided fertile ground for media scholars interested in assessing how people actually used the goods of late capitalism to make their own culture.<sup>31</sup> With the work of Patrice Petro, Lynn Spigel, and Tania Modleski, binaries of the "right" and "wrong" forms of art and mass culture audience as well as leisure (domestic) and labor (public) break down. In a 1986 article considering the disciplinary tensions between film and television studies, Petro writes, "The difference between art and mass culture—understood by means of a 'natural' opposition between activity and passivity—has long been assumed in our theories of culture."<sup>32</sup> Petro denaturalizes these categories by pointing out that

theoretical discussions of art and mass culture are almost always accompanied by gendered metaphors which link "masculine" values of production, activity, and attention with art, and "feminine" values of consumption, passivity, and distraction with mass culture.

Published in 1992, Spigel's *Make Room for TV* works at the binaries of leisure and labor, domestic and public, by following the spatial changes that took place in the 1950s, when television replaced the fireplace and the piano as the central focus of family entertainment. Spigel uses Benjamin's formulation of distraction to help account for the reconfigured patterns of leisure and labor that were produced in the home, in part, by television's programming structure. According to Spigel, television networks worked with the semiconscious state of receptivity, or with the "distracted onlooker," when they promoted "a state of 'utopian forgetfulness'" through which the

---

<sup>31</sup> John Fiske's *Television Culture* (1988), Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), David Morley's *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies* (1992) and Roger Silverstone's *Television and Everyday Life* (1994) as well as edited collections such as Spigel and Denise Mann's *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (1992).

<sup>32</sup> Patrice Petro, "Mass Culture and the Feminine: The 'Place' of Television in Film Studies," *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1986): 6.



housewife could move “freely between her work and the act of watching television.”<sup>33</sup> “Where did the morning go?” became advertising headlines, spoken by an ad agency’s version of the distracted housewife and mother who is unable to account for the passage of her work day.<sup>34</sup>

As Modleski writes, both watching television and working at home could only be accomplished in a state of distraction: “a distracted or distractable state of mind is crucial to the housewife’s efficient function *in* her real situation, and at *this* level television and its so-called distractions, along with the particular forms they take, are intimately bound up with women’s work.”<sup>35</sup> This more nuanced analysis of the fragmented and interdependent relation between labor and leisure within domestic space takes the distracted reception of television to be an integral component of the rhythm of work, rather than a retreat from it. The responsibility of the housewife to the emotional and material needs of her family, Modleski continues required that

she must be prepared to drop what she is doing in order to cope with various conflicts and problems the moment they arise. Unlike most workers in the labor force, the housewife must beware of concentrating her energies exclusively on any one task—otherwise, the dinner could burn or the baby could crack its skull....Daytime television plays a part in habituating women to distraction, interruption, and spasmodic toil....Indeed, I would argue that the flow of daytime television reinforces the very principle of interruptability crucial to the proper functioning of women in the home.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 85–86.

<sup>34</sup> The ad copy went on to list all the TV shows that organized a housewife’s day from breakfast to bed. Spigel, 87.

<sup>35</sup> Tania Modleski, “The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women’s Work,” in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, The American Film Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 2 (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1984), 74.

<sup>36</sup> Modleski, 70–71.

Modleski, like Spigel, stresses that reception in a state of distraction marks both the experience of domestic labor as a productive force and the consumption of mass culture. She elaborates on this connection between television programming, distraction, and labor by maintaining that the discontinuous, often fragmented nature of daytime soap operas is organized around the rhythm of women's domestic labor. By formalizing this process of distracted reception, television programming's pattern of flow and interruption both trained and reconciled housewives to the conditions of their labor.

Having conclusively established the home as a site of production and consumption, Modleski further develops her analysis. She describes the form of labor that takes place in the distracted state by drawing an analogy between this distracted state and Benjamin's "art of being off center:" "The housewife, of course, is in one sense, like the little man at the Fun Fair [described in Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire], unemployed, but in another sense she is perpetually employed—her work, like a soap opera, is never done."<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the housewife's television programs involve her "in the pleasures of a fragmented life." Here Modleski draws links between distraction, forms of perpetual time, and labor. No sooner are the dishes washed, the laundry hung up to dry, and the floor mopped than another meal is eaten (more dirty dishes), the toddler has a potty-training accident (urine and fecal matter to be cleaned), and the cat spits up a hairball (dirty carpet). The demand for labor is renewed. Thus housework and childcare not only must be carried out in a state of

---

<sup>37</sup> Modleski, 71.

distraction but also are never completed. Here, the temporal form of the working day operates on a twenty-four hour clock—as dictated by broadcast television and domestic labor—and is cyclical rather than progressive. Some of these cycles take place within a day, some stretch out over weeks, months, or years. As Morse observes:

It also adjusts, or changes the quality of temporality. With these new experiences, the temporal world is “lifted out of history in favor of cyclical repetitions less determined by than modeled after daily or seasonal cycles...sun, life, generation.” The new cycles of commuting, shopping and viewing are detached, mutable.<sup>38</sup>

The form television programs take and the kind of attention they require facilitate, rather than distract from, these cycles of labor.

This analysis of the relation between broadcast television and the mass-culture audience is quite different from the received view produced by the heuristics of manipulation. As Modleski writes,

Ironically, critics of television untiringly accuse its viewers of indulging in escapism. In other words, both high art critics and politically oriented critics, though motivated by vastly different concerns, unite in condemning daytime television for *distracting* the housewife from her real situation.<sup>39</sup>

As Ross, Petro, Spigel, and Modleski forcefully demonstrate, the links between a passive audience and television are not quite as natural as they are made to appear. Ross’ dialectical tension between self-respect and the expert, Spigel’s work on the spatial changes to the home, and Spigel’s and Modleski’s analyses of domestic labor and leisure move conceptualizations of broadcast television’s distracted audience

---

<sup>38</sup> Morse, 202.

<sup>39</sup> Modleski, 74.

away from avant-garde television's characterization of this audience as a commodity. Whereas Ross conclusively demonstrates an interrelation between mass culture and the intellectual, Spigel shows how the interior design of the home is altered by the introduction of television. With their analyses of the domestic space, where network television is watched, Spigel and Modleski overturn the conventional wisdom of home as a refuge from labor. And Morse, as I show below, draws out links between the cyclical, dreamlike experience of watching television, commuting, or going to the mall. In this way, cultural studies and television studies break up the monolithic correlations assumed by supporters and producers of avant-garde television when they remind their readers that the domestic sphere is also a site of labor and production. Key aspects of this analysis include the time forms of fragmentation and repeatability, cycles produced by and for the distracted audience.

### **2.3 Expanded Television**

In the 1920s, Benjamin established links between mass, or popular, culture's distracted audience and the reception of architecture. For Benjamin, architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art that is absorbed by a collective in a state of distraction. Distraction is a translation of the German term used by Benjamin, *zerstreuung*. In addition to "distraction," equivalent English terms are scattering, dispersal, and dispersion. Most important, he stresses that this form of reception is embedded in a routine: "Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building" but instead must be understood as acquired by a person who becomes familiarized with the individual

work of architecture, through the force of habit. Such an individual thus gains “the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction.”<sup>40</sup> This state of distraction is semiconscious, its temporality is nonlinear, and its context is the everyday and thus shared by leisure and labor. In other words, the reception of architecture parallels the reception of mass culture in general and of television in particular.

Beatriz Colomina expands on Benjamin’s observation when she identifies modernism as the moment when mass culture and architecture merge:

The conventional view portrays modern architecture as a high artistic practice established in opposition to mass culture and to everyday life...In doing so, it has neglected the overwhelming historical evidence of modern architecture’s continuous involvement with mass culture.<sup>41</sup>

When writing about the transformations brought about by modernist architecture, Colomina proposes that architecture be thought of as a form of mass media: “It is actually the emerging systems of communication that came to define twentieth century culture—the mass media—that are the true site within which modern architecture is produced and with which it directly engages.”<sup>42</sup> That modern architecture is an extension of electronic media and vice versa, she argues, is a consequence of key structural changes made to domestic and institutional spaces: the picture window (opening up the home) and the curtain wall (opening up the office tower). These changes produce architectural spaces whose exterior and interior, or whose definitions as “public” or “private,” are defined more by electronic media such as television and the publicity it produces than by concrete and glass. As Colomina

---

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin, 240.

<sup>41</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

puts it, public and private develop into an image: “To be ‘inside’ this space [or in private] is only to see. To be ‘outside’ [or in public] is to be *in* the image, to be seen, whether in a press photograph, a magazine, a movie, on television, or at your window.”<sup>43</sup> Most important, Colomina’s argument moves definitions of public and private away from the agora, or the city square:

It no longer has so much to do with a public space, in the traditional sense of the public forum, a square, or the crowd that gathers around a speaker in such a place, but with the audience that each medium of publication reaches, independent of the place this audience might actually be occupying.<sup>44</sup>

Colomina displaces the concept of the public sphere away from physical space and toward a public that forms when it becomes visible.

Two distinct historical moments are at work here: one that is primarily reliant on architecture to establish the paradigms of visibility and invisibility that Colomina refers to and another, more recent, that is saturated by television. Benjamin’s and Colomina’s discussions draw out the defining features of mass media as the state of distraction in which it is received and the way mass media organizes public and private spheres. Together, they corroborate Williams’ warning that the term mass media falsely limits the study of popular culture to a few specialized areas such as electronic media and popular literature. As Gasché explains, Benjamin’s description of architecture’s audience implies that “the kind of relation to art that becomes dominant with film is in truth a liberation of the modes of perceptions of buildings by

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

the masses since time immemorial, modes repressed by auratic art.”<sup>45</sup> The architecture described by Colomina and the expanded presence of television noted by Anna McCarthy (to whom I will turn momentarily) and Spigel come together to describe the parameters of expanded television. The expanded presence of television does not therefore represent a foreign element invading and despoiling a pristine site (architecture); rather, what transforms is the interchange between two mass media that address a distracted audience. In other words, distraction’s association with television is not only predated by other forms of popular culture such as novels (Kant) and film (Duhamel) but also paralleled by the reception of architecture.

This interrelation between repetition and distraction was discerned by Spigel and Modleski in the home, but similar patterns emerge elsewhere. The time spent watching television, going to the mall, or commuting, has been understood as time spent in a vast wasteland. Mental life that occurs while driving on the freeway, shopping in the contemporary marketplace, and working at home requires vigilance and promotes a form of automatism, or “spacing out.” All three activities share the incomplete attachment to their spatial and temporal present described by Morse, producing Gasché’s lack of self-presence, or “the [distracted] state of mind...characterized by absentmindedness, habitual modes of thinking and unfocused, incidental relations to its surroundings.”<sup>46</sup>

In 1981 Peter Gibian’s analysis of the evolution of shopping-center design and its influence on shopping in the mall drew the experience of watching television

---

<sup>45</sup> Gasché, 199–200.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 198.

outside the home.<sup>47</sup> As Gibian contends, the mall designer's goal was to "dissolve the static sense of the building frame, making it serve simply as the site for perception of changes in visual effects."<sup>48</sup> The ultimate goal for the mall designer was to create an architectural "inner realm" similar to the experience of the diorama, the cinema, and the fun fair, which would encourage the (typically female) shopper, to take leave of her rational, everyday self and consume goods she would otherwise have left on the shelf. In the 1950s mall designers such as Richard Bennett intended to channel the act of looking through architectural structure:

[S]o the mall is seen as a sort of "moving picture," with a coyly erotic plot of Girl Meets Goods....If a mall is a successful movie, its shopper will lose herself (Bennett's 1950s customer is always female), forget that building frame, suspend disbelief, and consummate "the experience."<sup>49</sup>

Coney Island represented the ideal of amusement in enclosure, where shoppers get lost in an involuntary repetition within the oneiric circles of visual attractions: "a meandering closed ring which returns on itself so that one starts a second circuit before one realizes it."<sup>50</sup> Here architecture reproduces the partial disconnect from "real" time experienced by the housewife in her working day. Her measurement of time as a series of cycles is also repeated in the closed rings of visual attractions,

---

<sup>47</sup> See also Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mark Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2005); James J. Farrell, *One Nation under Goods: Malls and the Seductions of American Shopping* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003); M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Peter Gibian, "The Art of Being Off-Center: Shopping Center Spaces and Spectacles," *Tabloid* 5 (1981): 50.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



which in this context are conceived to keep her moving through a cycle of consumption.

From the late 1950s to the present, the broadcast television audience watches has changed, even as cultural studies and television studies established more subtle analyses of this audience. It is by now a commonplace that television has been transformed radically since the demise of the three-network system in the United States. This begins with the introduction of cable television in the mid-1970s and continues from the 1980s onward with the increasing commercialization of state-run systems in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere. As Spigel claims in her introduction to *Television after TV*, the transformation continues with

the rise of multi-channel cable and global satellite delivery, multinational conglomerates, Internet convergence, changes in regulation policies and ownership, the advent of HDTV, technological changes in screen design, the innovation of digital television systems like TiVo, and new forms of media competition [that] all contribute to transformations in the practice of what we call watching TV.<sup>51</sup>

In the light of these changes, television's audience also needs to be reassessed.

Just as broadcast television has changed, so too have its sites of reception shifted significantly. As Anna McCarthy points out, television has never just been found in the home, despite being identified almost exclusively with it. While studies linking television to the experiences of commuting and the mall have appeared since the 1980s onward, in the last ten years especially television sets have saturated transitional public spaces—transportation hubs such as airports and bus terminals,

---

<sup>51</sup> Lynn Spigel, "Introduction," in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

waiting rooms in hospitals and other health care facilities, hotel lobbies, Laundromats, and theme restaurants, as well as more traditional venues such as the tavern and its descendent, the sports bar.<sup>52</sup> McCarthy's authoritative study establishes links between the presence of television sets in these transitional spaces and work on the public sphere. Her study also reaches beyond recent work on the shopping mall and the freeway when it shows how electronic news tickers and billboard-sized television screens in turn form billboard and information displays. The history of the news ticker provides an instructive example of the fluidity as well as the historic nature of the exchange between public spaces and broadcast space. A news ticker (or a "crawler") refers in the first instance to a long, thin display that wraps around the facades of offices or public buildings.<sup>53</sup> In 1928 the New York Times corporation first put up a news ticker outside its headquarters in Times Square. Current versions are made using LED screens that contain textual information scrolling horizontally. A news ticker also refers to a similarly horizontal band of textual information that scrolls across the bottom of television screens, and which is dedicated to presenting either headlines or secondary news items. After the September 11 attacks of 2001, the ticker became an omnipresent part of televised news in the United States. Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC placed news tickers at the bottom of the television screen on the

---

<sup>52</sup> See Anna McCarthy, "TV, Class and Social Control in the 1940s Neighborhood Tavern," *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 29–62.

<sup>53</sup> A news ticker known as "the zipper" wraps around 1 Times Square in New York City. Another ticker, displaying the latest stock prices, is also located in Times Square. Several buildings in midtown Manhattan feature news tickers: for example, the exterior of the Fox News/News Corporation headquarters on the west side of Rockefeller Center, and the ABC news outpost in Times Square. When NBC renovated 10 Rockefeller Center to accommodate *The Today Show* in 1994, a red LED ticker was added to the perimeter of the building at the juncture of the first and second floors. The ticker updates continuously, even when the show is off the air. In London, England, the Reuters building has a news ticker and stock ticker for the NYSE, NASDAQ, and the LSE.

day of the attacks, in order to provide a constant stream of necessary but repetitive emergency-related information. Although the need for attack-related tickers lasted only a few weeks, the news ticker has become a permanent feature on all three channels.<sup>54</sup>

The fluidity of this exchange describes an interchange between broadcast television and public spaces that goes beyond the mere placement of television sets and plasma screens in new locations, spaces beyond the enclosure of the mall and the freeway. Rather, just as the introduction of television sets alters the domestic interior, as Spigel observes, expanded television changes the very architecture of the space it occupies, as well as the way that space is used. Robert Venturi is unabashedly optimistic about what he sees as the liberating potential of the relatively recent marriage between new electronic technologies and architecture, which he believes is capable of infusing public space with a renewed vigor equal to the glory of Byzantine architecture. He hails the advent of this electronic age: “when computerized images can change over time, information can be infinitely varied rather than dogmatically universal, and communication can accommodate diversities of cultures and

---

<sup>54</sup> While news tickers were not widespread on broadcast television until September 11, 2001, the first record of a regularly used news ticker dates from NBC’s Today show on January 14, 1952. At the time, the Today ticker consisted of a long strip of paper with typewritten headlines that was superimposed on the lower third of the screen. It was quickly dropped. In the 1980s, local television stations used a ticker placed over local morning newscasts to pass along information on school closings made necessary by, for example, severe weather. The start of the ticker’s cycle was often accompanied by a signal designed to attract the audience’s attention, usually the station’s channel number in Morse code. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, CNN Headline News and CNBC and ESPN introduced tickers that featured stock prices and sports scores. In 1996, the spin-off network ESPN2 debuted a ticker, the “BottomLine,” which provided sports scores and news nearly twenty-four hours a day.

vocabularies, vulgar and tasteful, Pop and highfaluting....”<sup>55</sup> These innovations result in “grand advertising Jumbotrons” that straddle buildings in Tokyo and Osaka as well as New York and London. These advertisements, in Venturi’s mind, rival temple hieroglyphics and mosaic iconography: “the sparkle of pixels can parallel the sparkle of tesserae and LED can become the mosaics of today. What S. Apollinare Nuovo does inside we can do inside and/or outside.”<sup>56</sup> This vision of a Ravenna basilica turned inside out expands on the earlier premise developed in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), in which Venturi, together with Denise Scott Brown and Charles Izenour, analyze the “electronic shed,” or generic structures overlaid with signage worthy of the Las Vegas strip.<sup>57</sup> Venturi’s, Scott Brown’s and Izenour’s earlier study and Venturi’s more recent essay stress the existence of codependent, yet distinct systems of communications: one two-dimensional (the signage in the earlier study, the Jumbotrons in the article on iconography and electronics), the other three-dimensional (the buildings that these signage and video systems are layered over).

At the heart of McCarthy’s study is an insistence that we think of “the practice we call watching TV” as a dialectic between “the placeless generality of the image, [and] the specificity of its terminal forms as they appear on screens of all sizes and in all sorts of spaces.” Negotiating this dialectic involves understanding that television’s place in an environment is located on multiple levels,

---

<sup>55</sup> Robert Venturi, *Iconography and Electronics Upon a Generic Architecture: A View From the Drafting Room* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Venturi, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, Revised edition (1977, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 17.

from the quantum social forces that give certain places their particularity—even “nonspaces” like airports—to the top-down institutional systems that attempt to impose models of spectatorship on them....Television is caught in [the movement between the theoretical and the concrete], not easily mapped onto an opposition between the individual and the institutional, the local vs the mass, “place” vs. “space.” Rather, time and again environmental discourses and practices of the public screen show these apparent opposites crossing one another and indeed serving as vehicles for each environment’s grammar of social space.<sup>58</sup>

Drawing on art history, McCarthy advocates a site-specific approach to this network of social, cultural, and technological forces, which would be finely attuned to the complex scale in which actions, gestures, and acts are formed through television’s presence within particular environments. McCarthy’s study acknowledges television’s role in forming spaces and places away from the home. Its stated objective—to maintain the specificity of each location where television is found—also requires a review of the conditions of labor and leisure that inform the states of distraction in which television is received in these spaces.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the public found in the new spaces of expanded television also receives a hostile reception. McCarthy notes that in the transitional public contexts she identifies, television “is very frequently characterized by journalists and academics alike...as a contaminant polluting the polis [because of its role in privatizing public space], bombarding us with images, destroying the pristine space of the public sphere.”<sup>59</sup> These observations blithely ignore the links so persuasively drawn out by Colomina and Benjamin between architecture and mass media. These journalists and academics treat audiences of television in public spaces

---

<sup>58</sup> McCarthy, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4.

no better than the many champions and producers of avant-garde television in the 1960s and 1970s treated this audience's domestic counterparts. An analogous conflation of theoretical investment and class hostility results in "flattened caricatures," created out of the "mobile modern subjects who move, create, and work in the ephemeral and transitory spaces that television occupies outside of the home."<sup>60</sup> McCarthy cites an example of this contempt from a review of the theme restaurant Planet Hollywood by a *Times of London* reporter:

[The review] describes the space as a chaotic postmodern jumble, its TVs showing "montage with no regard for narrative, meaning or even cinematographic style. They are pointless pictures [for the reviewer], evidently silent; they are wallpaper, moving posters. But they are watched." The viewers, however, are apparently the most revolting thing about the place....They watch..."with open-mouthed attention so that you can watch their masticatory kit. They watch because this is what they do at home." The article bestows a metonymic nickname on Planet Hollywood's viewer-diners, one drenched in class hatred, calling them simply "tracksuit bottoms" (sweatpants, to an American).<sup>61</sup>

Watching television in an American theme restaurant is the justification used by this British journalist for his excoriation of the viewer-diner.

Recent scholarship such as McCarthy's builds on feminist television scholarship's reappraisal of the (domestic) television audience. Even as it uncouples television from the domestic sphere, the conservative wing of architectural theory unwittingly mimics the arguments of television's agonistic avant-garde. It criticizes contemporary public space—the new commercial strip, the shopping mall, and the franchise hotel—precisely because that space reproduces television's illusionistic

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5–6.

production and modular structure. Like Colomina, theorists and historians adhering to this conservatism argue that broadcasting television's advertisement and programming structure had a formidable influence on modern and contemporary architecture: urban, suburban and ex-urban. Unlike Colomina, they see it as an innovation that spells doom for the public sphere. These broader failures in analysis emerge in the work of Michael Sorkin, Kent MacDonald, Ada Louis Huxtable, and Neal Leach. MacDonald wrote,

We experience McDonald's, Wendy's, and Exxon, both out on the road and in the transient images of television, and the mutual dependency of the road and television has changed our architecture. The strip has become the Television Road...which is the city for millions of Americans...a prefronted landscape, bereft of local meaning both because of its subordination to a national network of identical places, and because of its dependence, via television, on a national "programmed" experience.<sup>62</sup>

"Television Road," concluded MacDonald, was—paraphrasing Newton Minow's famous speech, cited in chapter 1—a reflection of the "cultural wasteland" on which it was dependent.<sup>63</sup> With this reflexive aping of the criticisms levied against commercial broadcast television in the 1960s and 1970s, MacDonald reinforces the assertion that architecture is a form of high art rather than—as Colomina argues—mass media.

In his introduction to *Variations on a Theme Park*, Sorkin describes a new type of ex-urban environment, which features "hermetically sealed atrium hotels cloned from coast to coast" and the "disaggregated sprawl of endless new suburbs

---

<sup>62</sup> Kent MacDonald, "The Commercial Strip: From Main Street to Television Road," *Landscape* 28, no. 2, (1985): 12–13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

without cities.” Both share the structural forms of television—the modular interchangeability of its commercial programming—as well as what Sorkin identifies as television’s placelessness:

The “design” of television is all about erasing difference [between the components of the broadcast day], about asserting equal value for all the elements in the net, so that any of the infinite components that the broadcast day produces can make “sense.” The new city likewise eradicates genuine particularity in favor of a continuous urban field, a conceptual grid of boundless reach.<sup>64</sup>

For Sorkin, in this new “continuous urban field” that stretches beyond the traditional city limits to enfold other transient or marginalized spaces such as highways, commercial strips, and the suburbs is missing the agora, the public square, and the downtown center—in other words, spaces that are vital, for Sorkin, to the formation of the public sphere.<sup>65</sup>

As this brief review demonstrates, television, the dominant mass medium of the 20th century formed a site of debate, optimism, and anxiety for later theorists of the public sphere when it expanded into spaces outside of the home. The two major subcategories of expanded television are television in public spaces and “television architecture” such as shopping malls. The more conservative champions of the public sphere fall into the trap of condemning television as an enemy of democracy. This view is a consequence of the continued reliance on a model of enlightenment in which rational thought is used to vilify the expansion of television into architecture. The zoned-out viewer, trapped in a landscape of generic, modular consumption—be it

---

<sup>64</sup> Michael Sorkin, “Introduction,” in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), xi–xii.

<sup>65</sup> Sorkin, xv.



film, broadcast television, modern or postmodern architecture—could not, in these critics' estimations, be a full participant in democracy.

MacDonald's and Sorkin's perspectives are borne from what McCarthy describes as "utopian ideas attached to public space...specifically, idealistic notions of public space as a polis under siege...."<sup>66</sup> The urtext of these utopian ideals is, of course, Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Habermas postulated a space separate from both government and corporations, in which individuals could come together to debate the pressing issues of the day, or a public sphere. Habermas understood mass media to be crucial to the formation of the public sphere. Together, for Habermas, they in turn made possible the formation of public opinion—namely, the task of criticism and control that a body of citizens formally and informally practiced vis-à-vis the ruling structure.<sup>67</sup> In other words, Habermas sees the emergence of a reasoning public, where public opinion is formed through discourse and debate: "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body."<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> McCarthy, 5–6. See Ada Louis Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: New Press, 1997), and Neil Leach's *The Anaesthetics of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> With the new public spaces opening up to the bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century European market cities—chocolate or coffee houses, promenades in public parks, theaters and the public square—a liberal democratic ideal was won.

<sup>68</sup> Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" (1964), *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 49. Habermas credits eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois culture with the formation of the public sphere. His model, however, is an ahistorical and idealized account of the Enlightenment period. Thomas McCarthy, a longtime scholar and critic of Habermas, charges that Habermas' treatment of historical fact is scant and incomplete. Peter Hohendahl and Marc Silberman note that ahistorical models have two functions. The first is to provide a paradigm for analyzing historical changes, and the other to create a normative platform for the critique of politics. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, two of Habermas's earliest critics, redefine the public sphere as a complex association of heterogeneous organizations in which certain social aspects are represented and "motivation, practical actions, and mental activity converge." This

For conservative champions of the public sphere, the interpenetration of architecture and mass culture, as well as of architecture and distraction—which became unavoidable through the introduction of expanded television—shut out the Enlightenment project of a public sphere; just as the reception of film, and after it, television, refused the Kantian flowering of consciousness that was and continues to be understood as integral to the art experience. The irrational public, as Sorkin, MacDonald and others point out, replaces a rational public. Through their respective considerations of this irrational public Stan Douglas and Paul Pfeiffer enter into expanded television. While their work ultimately does not disturb the binaries of fine art and attention, mass media and distraction, within expanded television they both address the distracted audience and include it in their conceptual frame.

## **2.4 Stan Douglas: The Zwolle Proposal**

Rethinking public video art through expanded television permits a better understanding of the tension between dematerialization and site specificity in contemporary art that enters expanded television's realm. A key figure is the artist

---

definition of experience is shaped by labor processes, relation to production, and sociocultural factors, which come together to form the proletarian public sphere. The proletarian public sphere served as a conceptual place for finding common ground between various groups and affiliations, or multiple "counterpublics," particularly those blocked from the bourgeois public sphere. Negt and Kluge's proletarian public sphere also provides a means for masses of working class people to autonomously articulate their own needs and define a new framework of experience. To this end, Kluge supported alliances between government, the avant-garde and the "private consciousness industry" as the best solution to changing the relation between producers and consumers of knowledge production through television. Thomas McCarthy, preface to *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, eds. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe and Albrecht Wellmer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), ix–x.; Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Marc Silberman "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture. Jurgen Habermas and His Critics," *New German Critique*, no. 16 (Winter, 1979): 89118; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, ed. Miriam Hansen, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 27.

Stan Douglas. Over the last three decades, Douglas has produced a body of work highly attuned to the limits and the possibilities of representation. While Douglas's work is always formally and thematically influenced by the specific conditions of its given site, like expanded television it is not simply or even primarily a space. Rather, as McCarthy observes about expanded television, it is a densely traversed intersection of social, cultural, and intellectual histories.

Douglas's early works carried forward avant-garde television's practice of disrupting network television programming by using brief (preferably unannounced) interruptions of daily programming. Alongside Chris Burden (*Chris Burden Promo*, 1976, in which the artist bought twenty-four thirty-second commercial spots) and Bill Viola (*Reverse Television: Portraits of Viewers*, a series of fifteen-second spots that aired on KQED in 1982), Douglas developed *Television Spots* (1987–88) and then *Monodramas* (1991). As its title implies, *Television Spots* was a series of short video sequences (twelve of them) that were conceived of as unannounced and unIntroduced interruptions of regular broadcast television programming. A fifteen to thirty-second-long spots was to be aired nightly. The locations in *Television Spots* are interchangeable, and the actions banal: in other words, tape normally cut out of edited shots. In this way, they take on the quality of reality captured as found footage, as fragmentary found objects. Like the soap operas analyzed by Modleski, *Television Spots* consisted of narrative fragments of waiting, misunderstandings, and the impossibility of resolution. Unlike soap operas, however, *Television Spots* did not promise a continuation of the narrative fragment into next week, or even next season.

One of the spots, *Answering Machine*, begins with a woman entering her apartment. The moment she finds her keys, the telephone rings inside. She steps inside, drops her handbag, and sits down. She lights a cigarette. On the table beside her, the telephone continues ringing. The spot ends with the caller leaving a message. In 1989 *Television Spots* was broadcast in Saskatoon and Ottawa during commercial breaks in regular programming.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, Douglas's *Monodramas*—ten thirty- to sixty-second videos—were conceived as interruptions of the usual flow of advertising and entertainment on commercial broadcast television, to be broadcast nightly in 1992 for three weeks in Toronto and Vancouver. While these narratives mimicked television's editing techniques, like *Television Spots* they failed to cohere. A car and a school bus narrowly avoid colliding at an intersection; they then continue on their way as if nothing untoward had taken place. Two pedestrians cross paths on a street. One greets the other, an African-Canadian, only to be told, "I'm not Gary." According to the Guggenheim website, when the videos were aired unannounced during commercial breaks, viewers called the station to ask what was being advertised, which describes how attention becomes refocused away from content to consumption during broadcast television's flow.<sup>70</sup>

Liminal spaces suspended precariously in time form the core of many of Douglas's projects: "I'm always looking for this nexus point, the middle ground of

---

<sup>69</sup> Scott Watson, Diana Thater and Carol J. Clover, *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon, 1998). Yan Stanton, "Stan Douglas," in *Seeing Time*, exhibition of the Kramlich collection at the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, <http://on1.zkm.de/kramlich/douglas> (accessed June 18, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Guggenheim Collection—Artist—Douglas—Monodramas, [http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist\\_work\\_md\\_41A\\_4.html](http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_md_41A_4.html) (accessed May 21, 2007).

some kind of transformation,” Douglas observes, adding “I guess this accounts for the embarrassingly consistent binary constructions in my work. Almost all of the works...address moments when history could have gone one way or another. We live in the residue of such moments,” he contends, “and for better or worse their potential is not yet spent.”<sup>71</sup> Douglas’s intricately layered installations are equally open to psychoanalytic readings: they are “less concerned with the narration of the event than with the space of its unfolding, like the obsessive remembrance and reconsideration of a traumatic incident in one’s life that cannot be resolved because its true cause was elsewhere, and remains unavailable to the space of memory.”<sup>72</sup>

In 1997–98 Douglas spent a great deal of time in Detroit working on a series, entitled *Detroit Photos*. A related film installation, *Le Détroit*, was completed in 1999. In a synchronized two-track sixteen-millimeter black-and-white film installation, he continuously looped the negative print of a story also set in Detroit.<sup>73</sup> The installation adapted Shirley Jackson’s 1959 novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and Marie Hamlin’s 1883 chronicle, *Legends of Le Détroit*. For this work, Douglas invoked the horror-movie genre to explore the impact of popular culture and technology on social imagination. It tells the short story of a woman, Eleanore, who breaks into a deserted house in Herman’s Gardens, a housing development. The former inhabitants have left behind a remarkable collection of domestic junk.

Douglas’ narrative techniques underscore the compulsive nature of her story: its

---

<sup>71</sup> Stan Douglas, “Diana Thater in Conversation with Stan Douglas,” in Scott Watson, Diana Thater, Carol J. Clover, *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 28–29.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Lynne Cooke, “Stan Douglas and Douglas Gordon: *Double Vision*,” <http://www.diaart.org/exhibs/douglasgordon/double/essay.html> (accessed May 22, 2007)

<sup>73</sup> “Le Détroit,” or “the narrows,” is the original French name of the city.

constant repetition is visually obscured in the muddy halftones of a film that describe a world made purely of shadows. As Okwui Enwezor writes, “Herman’s Gardens...comes to stand then as the symbolic unconscious of Detroit’s trauma, while Eleanore’s presence and her search restore the black social order that disappeared with the city’s urban decline.”<sup>74</sup> Through the Detroit projects, Douglas continued his interest in failed utopias, which he identified through the dysfunctional relationships between groups of people competing over limited resources. Later works such as *Inconsolable Memories* (2005) and *Klatsassin* (2006) continue these themes.

Common to Douglas’s work for both network television and the museum are cyclical, repetitive time forms and open-ended, incomplete narratives, which maintain an uncomfortable proximity to the everyday. They also take as axiomatic the need for the audience’s engagement to complete the work. This extends Douglas’s early interest in Samuel Beckett’s reconceptualization of the theater as a practice in which “both audience and author are asked early on to admit their complicity in the visibility of the spectacle, and distanced judgment or interpretive ‘explanation’ becomes an uneasy pretence.”<sup>75</sup> As Douglas explains in a conversation with curator Lynne Cooke, “if the audience has no way of finding a language of its own to understand a project,

---

<sup>74</sup> Okwui Enwezor, *Stan Douglas: Le Detroit* at the Art Institute of Chicago (2000)

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Jean-Christophe Royoux, “The Conflict of Communications,” *Stan Douglas* exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993), 63.

then that project is unsuccessful. I may as well have just written on a piece of paper a statement saying ‘I mean this.’”<sup>76</sup>

While he is best known for these complex, ambitious museum installations, Douglas’s art for gallery spaces is not, as Sven Lütticken observes, “a kind of *rappel à l’ordre*” that results in auratic art insulated from “the destabilizing effects of television.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Douglas never tried to distance his work from the close links between video and television. Works such as *Journey into Fear* (2001) and *Suspiria* (2002/2003) were broadcast on television as well as shown in galleries. Beyond such a direct engagement with broadcast television, Douglas’s video and film installations also address the various permutations of “television.” The 1994 video installation *Evening*, which charts the arrival of “happy talk” in news bulletins, is one of many examples of television at the core of Douglas’s work. This is also evident in his public art. By transposing the cyclical time form, incomplete narratives, and the centrality of the audience that emerged in his work for broadcast television and his museum installations, Douglas’s “expanded television” points to some of the psychosocial realities that underpin the banality of the everyday as it is experienced in the city, at the mall, or on the freeway.

In the mid-1990s, Douglas proposed a video installation designed to be screened from dusk until dawn atop a regional-mental-health care facility in Zwolle,

---

<sup>76</sup> Stan Douglas, “In Conversation with Lynne Cooke, 1993,” in Scott Watson, Diane Thater, Carol J. Clover, *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 121.

<sup>77</sup> Sven Lütticken, “Media Memories,” Stan Douglas, *Inconsolable Memories: Stan Douglas* exh. cat. (Omaha, NB: Joslyn Art Museum, 2005), 126.

the Netherlands.<sup>78</sup> Two enormous screens, approximately fourteen feet wide and eighteen-feet tall, were to be mounted on top of an elevator shaft of the RIAGG, or the Regional Institute for Community Mental Health Care building. Sited between the banks of the Zwarte Water—a river that girdles what remains of Zwolle's seventeenth-century city walls—and a highway that connects the Netherlands from north to south, the institute is literally at the city's margin. Integrated with the institute's architecture, the screens would be positioned back-to-back: one screen would face the highway while the other would be directed toward Zwolle's market square, or the traditional city center.

In choosing to site his installation between the highway and the marketplace, Douglas appropriated the commercial language of billboards. As Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour observed in 1972, this language was formed in response to the shift in the way people traveled in the postwar, post-Eisenhower era. A car-oriented culture emerges out of the construction of the interstate highway system, resulting in clusters of buildings adjacent to the highway, or strips. These plain boxes were entirely dependent on signs designed to communicate their meaning at a glance to passing motorists, whose perception had narrowed dramatically as a function of the speed at which they traveled. The relation between the colloquial term used to define these new forms of highway-dependent commercial sites and a filmstrip is hardly coincidental.

---

<sup>78</sup> The project was not accepted. A maquette and photographs were included in the exhibition *Skulptur. Projekte in Münster 1997*, June 22-September 28, 1997.



These codependent and distinct communications systems come together to form a state of reception. Forms of modern architecture, and then postmodern architecture (as Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour came to characterize it), were defined by a certain temporal relationship between the building and its visual consumers, which was analogous to a cinematic experience. Here, the use of space is predicated on a temporal relationship in which the onlooker moves and the image is fixed. Pedestrians walking through Zwolle's city center would see one screen, which would show a film that consisted of images of people engaged in conversation in particular locations in Zwolle's expanding periphery. Motorists on the highway would see conversations taking place in the old town's narrow intersections and cul-de-sacs. Projected on an elevated screen near both the river and the freeway, the work was sited between the metropolis and suburb. The "periphery" Douglas had in mind was a reference not merely to the city's residential suburbs, where most of those employed within the city center reside but, just as important, to the interstitial location between the inner and outer space of the metropolis where the daily commute took place.

With the formal language of commercial signage and its temporal interaction with the viewer as its structure, Douglas returned to the early history of psychiatry in the Netherlands for his work's subject matter. The two screens of Douglas's installation would show two films containing references to the relationship both between the city and its surroundings and between the patient and his or her

environment. As he observed in his project's proposal, psychoanalytic concepts and techniques are necessarily historical, and culturally specific:

The success of Behaviorism in mid-century Europe likely had more to do with the grim prospect of postwar reconstruction than many of its adherents would like to admit, just as Freud may not have catalogued the basic narratives of human socialization, although he certainly did create an extremely detailed portrait of his clientele, the Viennese bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup>

In the early postwar period, an equally detailed social portrait was developed by the Dutch therapist Arie Querido. The psychoanalytic tradition found in the Netherlands was preoccupied not with basic structures of the individual psyche but with the complex and contingent relationship between “a citizen and their societal Pillar.” Querido's key work, *Introduction to Integral Medicine* (1955), made the reasonable but, until then, rare proposition that not only a patient's interior experiences but also his or her exterior relationships—or the totality of social, economic, and cultural conditions to which that individual had been subjected—are the causes of psychic crisis.<sup>80</sup> The goal of therapy was equilibrium, which could only be achieved through a consideration of these two spheres in an individual's life. Querido's first case studies examined how respondents were recovering from more or less somatic illnesses; his concluding studies describe recoveries that had been inhibited by extrinsic factors such as economic problems and conflicts within families, as well as religious and social relations.

---

<sup>79</sup> Stan Douglas, “Project for the RIAGG Zwolle” (1997), [http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/douglas/k\\_e.htm](http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/douglas/k_e.htm) (accessed May 30, 2007).

<sup>80</sup> To the best of my knowledge, no translation for this book exists. I am using the English title Douglas provided in his project proposal. The original Dutch reference is as follows: Arie Querido, *Inleiding tot een integrale geneeskunde* (Leiden: Stenfert Kroese, 1955).

Atop this mental hospital, a place where borderline subjects are prepared for their reentry into society, the two films facing both the highway and the city center narrated dramatic condensations of the 1,630 interviews Querido published in *Integral Medicine*. These discursive fragments that questioned, affirmed, and explained were to be performed by actors in a studio, shot individually in medium and close-up shots, and then composited into their settings at Zwolle's city center or periphery. Using Querido's work as its theoretical base, Douglas's project both represented and was structured by these dynamics of identity and difference, individual and community. Thus, his choice of the liminal space between a city and its margins points to the critical function of "the negotiation of another liminal space: the permeable membrane that is an individual's coincidence with their community." For Douglas, "a city, much like a human subject, might be best understood from the periphery," or the liminal moment where self leaves off and other begins: "Once the manner in which a city or person distinguishes itself from its surroundings is discovered, in that zone where it is no longer self-identical, one can begin to understand how the community or individual tacitly conceives of itself."<sup>81</sup> In his proposal, Douglas describes it as follows: "The montage [of interviews] on both screens will be generated in real time by computer-controlled disc players programmed in accordance with the so-called 'Kuleshov Effect'—the fact that each time the same set of cinematic materials is recombined in a different order, its affective character changes." Each individual sequence appearing upon the screen

---

<sup>81</sup> Stan Douglas, "Project for the RIAGG Zwolle" (1997), [http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/douglak\\_e.htm](http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/douglak_e.htm) (accessed May 30, 2007).

would last only a few minutes. Yet it would be juxtaposed with other sequences in real time, selected randomly by computer, such that the combination would produce a different effect in each encounter between installation and commuter, installation and pedestrian.<sup>82</sup> The total collection of sequences would last twenty-five hours and would be timed so that a daily commuter would only see the full range of combinations after a period of six months.

The liminality under consideration in Douglas's project was both spatial—its location in the netherworld between urban density and suburban sprawl—and temporal, since its audience encountered the project either while commuting or meandering through the city center. Caught between work and home, commuters and pedestrians would experience an artwork whose temporality doubled the fragmentary, repetitive, yet continuous experience of commuting and watching commercial broadcast television. In 1990 Morse noted that the experience of watching television was related to the experience of driving on the freeway, as well as going to the mall. All three composed a nexus of interdependent two- or three-dimensional forms. In Morse's words, these act as loci of an attenuated "fiction effect," where the partial loss of connection to the present is experienced.<sup>83</sup> A precondition of distraction is the idea of mobile privatization, which is not just the corporate privatization of public space but also the partial disconnection of individuals from their immediate surroundings and their attendant responsibilities through daydreams. This fiction

---

<sup>82</sup> This is a very effective technique that Douglas uses in his many museum installations.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, The Mall and Television," in *Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 193.

effect involves simultaneous objects of attention: Morse uses Benjamin's term when she describes it as a "phantasmagoria of the interior."<sup>84</sup> While television epitomizes the new ontology, in which vast realms of the somewhat less than real occupy significant amounts of our "free" time, dreamlike displacement also occurs in the freeway and the mall, semiautonomous zones that float over their surrounding geography. Morse writes,

[A] freeway is not a place but a *vector*...largely experienced as "in-between,"...rather than the full reality of a process or a destination....In this intensely private space, lifted out of the social world, the driver is subject, more real and present to him or herself than the miniatures or the patterns of light beyond the glass...<sup>85</sup>

For Morse, this realm of fantasy is the compensation for dislocation from both work and home. In other words, a disengagement takes place in these new spaces of the television, the mall, and the freeway that results from an individual's interior narrative moving him or her away from the preexisting spatio-temporal context. Thus Douglas proposes a work that takes the psychology of a social subject as its subject and shows it in a context where his audience is daydreaming, where consciousness is lowered. In this way, the work establishes two frames for its own definition. The first frame is the work itself—or the apparatus, the content, the scale of the screens facing the highway and the city center—and the location of the work as a community health center at the city's periphery. The second frame self-consciously incorporates what I

---

<sup>84</sup> Morse might have been better served using Benjamin's phrase "phantasmagoria of the marketplace," which he uses to describe the Paris arcades, the precursor to the shopping center. A "phantasmagoria of the interior," Benjamin writes, is "constituted by man's imperious need to leave the imprint of his private individual existence on the rooms he inhabits." Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (1939, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>85</sup> Morse, 199.

think of as the work's primary audience, the distracted motorist and the urban pedestrian. Each, in turn, is "consumed" as part of the larger work by a third frame, the attentive critic—that is, follower of Douglas who would read about the work after the fact.

Douglas submitted his project proposal to SKOR, a Dutch funding organization of public art.<sup>86</sup> Despite an enthusiastic reception from the art world (a maquette for the project and photographs were exhibited at Sculpture Project Münster in 1997) and the commitment of SKOR's director and the former Bureau for Visual Art Assignments (Praktijkbureau Beeldende Kunstopdrachten), the project was dropped. By proposing a work set in liminal spaces between subject and other, city and suburb, for an audience made up of pedestrians and commuters, Douglas engages with an audience that typically eludes the art- or high culture grasp, the mass audience. Through these dual frames of place and subject, he also contrasts two types of movement: the meandering stroll of the pedestrian and the directed movement of the commuter. In contrast to Douglas's proposed project, Paul Pfeiffer's *Orpheus Descending* fuses the pedestrian and the daily commute in its conceptual frame. In so doing, Pfeiffer's work became the focus of criticism typically reserved for mass culture.

---

<sup>86</sup> SKOR (Foundation Art and Public Space) was created when the Bureau for Visual Art Assignments (Praktijkbureau Beeldende Kunstopdrachten) became independent from the Mondriaan Foundation. The foundation is subsidized by the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs, and Science (OCW). SKOR is a national organization, which develops art projects in relation to public spaces. According to its website, SKOR "guides and advises organizations that wish to realize art in a public location, and provides financial support where necessary." "Foundation Art and Public Space," SKOR, <http://www.skor.nl/article-1527-en.html> (accessed June 18, 2008).

## **2.5 Paul Pfeiffer: *Orpheus Descending* (2001)**

At first, the work that Pfeiffer made for art galleries and museums—a series of tightly edited, miniature digital videos that interrogate the formation of public personalities, or celebrity—seem to have nothing to do with *Orpheus Descending*. The titles of these videos, and a parallel series of photographs, link his image-making practice to other historical periods and other visual media such as painting, cinema, theater, and television, as well as literary forms such as classical mythology and biblical tracts. Referring to his digital video installations as “video sculptures,” Pfeiffer typically reformats videos of Hollywood movies or sporting events to catch movie stars and sports heroes in moments of extreme emotion. His appropriation of these popular culture artifacts is arrived at through subtraction: his found videos of basketball players, boxers, or film stars are meticulously edited, until a central figure or pivotal moment is isolated, locked into an ambiguous moment or pose. What never disappears from his work is its background. Given Pfeiffer’s choice of subject matter, this is most frequently a crowd that has been drawn to the event, which in turn produces or is a consequence of a celebrity. The rapt attention of the crowd is reinforced through the viewing conditions that Pfeiffer established for these works. Shown on video monitors frequently just a few inches in length and width, Pfeiffer forces a physical intimacy between the viewer and his video sculptures, in this way making the viewer focus on sequences or reactions that normally go unnoticed. This is diametrically opposed to the condition of distraction into which Pfeiffer inserted *Orpheus Descending*.

For *John 3:16* (2000), Pfeiffer digitally manipulated a televised basketball game to keep the basketball in play continuously in the center of the screen, leaving it magically and erratically aloft in front of a sold-out NBA (National Basketball Association) crowd. A mesmerizing work, it simultaneously evokes sensations of motion and quiescence: the basketball floats at the center of the screen while the court, spectators, and the hands of the players spin around its fixed center. The title *John 3:16* refers to the following passage from the New Testament: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>87</sup> The title anchors the work to a biblical reference to life after death, while the cropped and spliced NBA footage refers to both the religious quality of spectacle in professional sports and the almost magical extension of a singular moment into a potential eternity through video editing. For his 1999 *Fragment of a Crucifixion (after Francis Bacon)*, Pfeiffer looped a thirty-second fragment of a moment on the basketball court. In this loop, the basketball star and Knicks forward Larry Johnson steps backward and forward, fists clenched, face contorted in an exultant shriek. The editing destabilizes his presumably victorious yell into a possible scream of terror or rage, which at once reinforces and undermines Johnson’s status as a sports superstar. Quoted in a *Village Voice* review, Pfeiffer comments that in this work he was less interested in Johnson’s body language than the formal relations between figure and ground. “In Francis Bacon’s painting [the

---

<sup>87</sup> John 3:16. Authorized (King James) Version.



original *Fragment of a Crucifixion*] you have human flesh dissolving back into paint,” while in his video the image is “dissolving into a background.”<sup>88</sup>

A conversation between the visible and the unseen but understood shapes his 2000 *The Long Count (I Shook Up the World)*. *The Long Count* used broadcasts of three important fights in Muhammed Ali’s career for raw material: Cassius Clay (Ali’s given name) versus Sonny Liston in Miami in 1964; Ali versus George Foreman in Kinshasha in 1974, and Ali versus Joe Frazier in Manila in 1975. Reworking the original broadcasts, Pfeiffer digitally edited the bodies of the participants in the ring—the referee, Ali, and his opponent—out of the work. In this work, the reading of “figure” is realized when the “ground,” or the crowd’s digital information, splits and reassembles into a coherent image that is slightly lower or higher than where it was previously. The tonal quality of the crowd, when temporarily occupying the “interior” of the shadows or the silhouettes, also becomes slightly darker than the audience on the “exterior.” The moving edges of the boxer-referee silhouettes appear as digital ripples that fissure the watching audience behind the ring. The camera pans from left to right and right to left, zooms in and out, following silhouettes that bob, weave, and jab from one end of the ring to the other. At regular intervals, flash bulbs go off. The loop ends with a long shot from above an empty ring.

---

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in C. Carr, “Icon Remix: Paul Pfeiffer Sees the Art Historical Vista from the Bates Motel,” *Village Voice*, November 29/December 5, 2000, <http://www1.villagevoice.com/news/0047,162203,20193,1.html> (accessed June 18, 2008).

Pfeiffer carries over this process of digital erasure into his photographs. An ongoing series, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* started with five images that used as raw material publicity stills of Marilyn Monroe jumping on a trampoline. Pfeiffer digitally removed Monroe by cutting and pasting fragments of the background over her figure. The series developed into something else after Pfeiffer started mining the archives of the NBA for photographs to manipulate: typically, he removes a lot of contextual detail in order to leave a solitary figure, such as the basketball star Wilt Chamberlain, isolated against the crowd. Pfeiffer chose the publicity stills of Monroe as the original subject for the series because, as he explains, “this has got to be one of the most famous human bodies in the archive. It conjures up so much, it’s such a legend.”<sup>89</sup> What interested Pfeiffer about the project was its process, not the final result:

It’s actually more like camouflage in the sense that you are taking pieces of the background from around the image and very slowly applying these pieces over the body so that in the end you’re presenting the illusion that you are seeing through to the background. But in fact you are inventing background material that wasn’t there before.

The title of the series, the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, refers to the famous woodcut by Albrecht Dürer. A leader of the northern Renaissance, Dürer helped establish both the modern figure study and portraiture. Dürer’s work embodied the apocalyptic spirit of his time, when famine, plague, and social and religious upheaval were commonplace. The four horsemen are figures from the bible who appear at Armageddon. Pfeiffer was drawn to a title that simultaneously referred to the

---

<sup>89</sup> Art:21.Paul Pfeiffer.Interview & Videos | PBS Erasure, Camouflage, & “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/pfeiffer/clip1.html> (accessed June 18, 2007).

historical evolution of the figure study and to a larger epic sweep that culminates in a cataclysmic ending.

For *The Pure Products Go Crazy* (1998), Pfeiffer looped a short clip from the film *Risky Business* (1983). In the loop, the movements of its star, Tom Cruise, are reduced to a series of mechanically repeated, pelvic thrusts as he writhes facedown on the couch. The video transforms a brief fragment of his character's excitement over having his family's house to himself for the weekend into simulated sex with furniture. By looping this fragment, the character's adolescent energy becomes a disturbingly manic episode. Pfeiffer also uses the phrase "the pure products go crazy" in an exegesis of twenty-first century late capitalism:

[W]e're in a stage of capital that is no longer sustainable, yet this only increases people's urgency to maintain the illusion that things are going on as they always have...obviously, it's a sad thing to insist on repressing what's happening to you. It's like not being able to accept that you're dying. Embodied in that condition are important possibilities that shouldn't be overlooked. That's something I see when I look at images on TV and in the movies. I feel very aware of these things as representations of an urgency to feel like things are ok. But it's clear that they're not....in the logic of capitalism, untransformed excess leads eventually to self-destruction: the pure products go crazy.<sup>90</sup>

Pfeiffer's gallery and museum works employ public spectacle as their subject matter.

With these works, Pfeiffer invokes the definitions of public and private that were established by the Colomina. As I summarize above, Colomina understands public and private to be conditions that are organized around being seen and not being seen.

A quintessential moment of being seen is, of course, celebrity. In these works,

---

<sup>90</sup> Jennifer Gonzalez and Paul Pfeiffer, "Paul Pfeiffer," *Bomb*, no. 83 (Spring 2003): 29.

Pfeiffer reproduces the obsessive attention that defines fandom, which is fueled by the illusion of intimacy between the fan and the celebrity.

Pfeiffer's choice of oblique titles, his concern for the consequences of late capitalism's repressions, and his interest in the formation of "public" through the presence of a crowd of people come together in *Orpheus Descending*. All Pfeiffer's work maintains a conceptualization of public and private that is not tied to outdoor space but is dependent on actions and states—in the case of *Orpheus Descending*, movement and distraction. *Orpheus Descending* makes use of the viewers' abstracted daily habits rather than the attention of a fan. Unlike the works I have just described, it erases nothing from the "event." Commissioned by the Public Art Fund, *Orpheus Descending* was designed for the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center. Over the summer of 2000, Pfeiffer and his collaborators John Letourneau and Lawrence Chua videotaped a flock of chickens on a farm in upstate New York. using three video surveillance cameras mounted on fixed tripods, they followed the birds' lives twenty-four hours a day, beginning with incubated eggs purchased from a local agricultural supplier, proceeding to the eggs' hatching at around seventeen days, then to the flock's move to its outdoor pen, and finally to the seventy-fifth day, when the chickens would reach market weight and be sent to slaughter in a commercial poultry operation. After the seventy-fifth day, the collaborators started killing and eating the chickens. The moments of slaughter and consumption, however, were not included in the final work, and in this way it repeats a quintessential repression in a capitalist economy that keeps production distinct from consumption. From April 15 to June 28,

2001, *Orpheus Descending*—the work made from this recording—was simultaneously shown on two of the plasma screens and video monitors providing information in the public thoroughfares of the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center complexes. The first, a PATHVISION information monitor wedged between a Hudson Newsstand and a Quick Card machine, was located in the mezzanine area at the foot of nineteen escalators leading to the New Jersey PATH train turnstiles.<sup>91</sup> The second was a plasma screen that placed the video between directional signage and advertisements promoting local businesses and cultural events on the North Bridge, a glass-enclosed pedestrian overpass connecting the World Trade Center with the World Financial Center.

Over a seventy-five day period, the video played in both locations as though in real time, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The work was originally intended to be presented as a satellite feed, in which the everyday lives of the chickens would be broadcast live, but the idea was set aside by Public Art Fund, the project's financial and logistical underwriter, because of its prohibitive expense.<sup>92</sup> To emphasize the real-time conceit of the work, the video's outdoor "time environment" was synchronized to coincide with the environment in which it was shown. While the first five weeks took place in an artificially lit environment, for the outdoor footage that made up the latter half of the video, Pfeiffer timed the video sunset and sunrises

---

<sup>91</sup> The Port Authority Trans-Hudson Corporation (PATH) was established in 1962 as a subsidiary of The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The heavily used rail transit system serves as the primary transit link between Manhattan and neighboring New Jersey urban communities and suburban railroads.

<sup>92</sup> Tom Eccles, "Orpheus Descending: A Conversation," in *Orpheus Descending*, Paul Pfeiffer et al., (New York: Public Art Fund, 2001), 15.

to coincide with the real sunsets and sunrises outside the buildings: “So you see the outdoor light and the video [light] simultaneously.”<sup>93</sup> Commuters daily glimpsed fragments of the pastoral narrative during their brief journey across the mezzanine and bridge to and from work.

In an interview with Tom Eccles (director of the Public Art Fund), Pfeiffer stressed that *Orpheus Descending* was “made specifically for an audience that passes through the World Trade Center every day,” an audience composed for the most part of workers whose offices were located in the two complexes.<sup>94</sup> These workers had been passing through the center for many years, he went on to say, and would continue to do so for many more, implying an expectation on Pfeiffer’s part of an open-ended and cyclical return to this space. In other words, the commuters’ movements could be characterized as a loop, whose formulation was determined both by the space and the requirements of their jobs. For Pfeiffer, *Orpheus Descending*’s success was dependent on its unannounced insertion into and withdrawal from this long, repetitious cycle of coming and going, to-ing and fro-ing: “One day the chickens appear in their [the commuters’] path, without any explanation, and then after you kind of get a handle on what is going on, they [the chickens] disappear again.” The work’s unannounced appearance and disappearance formed a second temporal frame, which Pfeiffer also characterizes as a loop: “It is in fact a very long loop. The finished piece is a series of seventy-five tapes—Tape One says ‘001,’ Tape

---

<sup>93</sup> Pfeiffer, “*Orpheus Descending*: A Conversation,” 23.

<sup>94</sup> Pfeiffer, “*Orpheus Descending*: A Conversation,” 20.

Two says ‘002,’ and so on....On the seventy-fifth day it goes back to 001 again.”<sup>95</sup>

Pfeiffer’s decision to label the work a loop links it both to a larger body of video installation art investigating the impact of repetitive editing, which my next chapter considers, and to the conundrum of time tied to a per-hour paycheck. Like the daily routine of the housewife and the cycle of the soap opera, the time of labor is measured in a series of cycles. Parceled out in a series of seemingly endless repetitions, time is measured by the daily arrival at and departure from work; the mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks; the weekly, biweekly, or monthly paycheck; and the annual vacation.

Like Douglas, Pfeiffer drew on the communication strategies of public commercial signage. Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour describe an architecture that is defined by commercial signs that communicate the function of various buildings, which are in turn reduced to a series of blank boxes: “the highway signs...make verbal and symbolic connections through space, communicating a complexity of meanings through hundreds of associations in few seconds from far away.”<sup>96</sup> These signs result in a highly sophisticated tempero-spatial relation to their audience that was incorporated by Pfeiffer. In the North Bridge overpass, the video was shown on two plasma screens between signage directing pedestrians to the U.S. Customs House, the World Trade Center, the subway and the PATH trains, handicap access, and advertisements for local services such as sushi takeout—“Johnney’s takeout (Fast! Fast! Fast! Sushi)” —and a sale at Barney’s. In the mezzanine at the foot of the

---

<sup>95</sup> Pfeiffer, “*Orpheus Descending: A Conversation*,” 21.

<sup>96</sup> Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 13.

elevators, the video was shown on the PATHVISION closed-circuit television monitor, ordinarily used to show information about the PATH trains to New Jersey. Below each monitor a plaque explained the work in the same vernacular as plaques marking sites of historic interest or scenic beauty along the highway. In the World Trade Center and the overpass to the World Financial Center, Pfeiffer, like Douglas, borrowed from broadcast television, as well as the strip, in order to communicate with a mobile audience for markedly different ends. Here, both the audience and the image are moving, but in two radically different ways: the commuter is hurrying to or from work, the virtual chickens are living out their days in virtual coops.

The title *Orpheus Descending* refers in the first instance to Orpheus, a figure from Greek mythology that stood for poetry and song. Orpheus is best known for his response to the tragic death of his wife, Eurydice. While trying to escape from Aristaeus, the son of Apollo, Eurydice stumbled over and was fatally bitten by a snake. Overcome with grief over her death, Orpheus played and sang so sorrowfully that he moved the gods to tears. They advised him to plead Eurydice's case to Hades, the lord of the underworld. On their advice, Orpheus traveled to the underworld, and with his music moved Hades and his wife Persephone to allow Eurydice to return with Orpheus to earth, restored to life. Hades imposed one condition: Orpheus should walk in front of her and not look back until they had both left his kingdom. Just as Orpheus reached the earth's surface he turned back to exhort her forward, and Eurydice vanished forever from his sight.



With this title, Pfeiffer ties a work that is located in and structured by the temporality of everyday actions to a belief in the redemptive power of art. When asked about the title of the work, Pfeiffer replied that he was responding to the waves of commuters that descended and ascended the massive banks of escalators as they made their way to and from the PATH trains. Jennifer Gonzalez indirectly referred to the Greek myth in an interview, when she asked Pfeiffer to explain the title:

Jennifer Gonzalez: The title, *Orpheus Descending*....Descending into the subway? Into the darkness?

Paul Pfeiffer: Yes. The station is one of the southernmost links to or points of access into Manhattan. I wanted to set up a very simple apparatus in conjunction with the existing apparatus that would change one's consciousness of time.<sup>97</sup>

Pfeiffer saw this change to the commuters' consciousness as a consequence of the insertion of a work of art into their everyday lives, and as a political project, in that it established "a space for a transgression or liberation" or an alteration of consciousness: "It seems to me a different space than the one advertising makes. I am curious about the distinction between artmaking and something like advertising, something more associated with entertainment." By setting up a certain construction of time—a story whose form both parallels and mimics their commute, *Orpheus Descending* presents a mystery and asks the "people who see it to grapple with what it means."<sup>98</sup> In other words, Pfeiffer set out to produce a work whose goal was to incite transgressive or liberatory thought in a moment embedded in commuters' routines, or a moment that Morse identified as incompletely attached to the present.

---

<sup>97</sup> Gonzalez and Pfeiffer, 27–28.

<sup>98</sup> Pfeiffer, "Orpheus Descending: A Conversation," 21.

Given the rapid ascendance of Pfeiffer's career and the highly favorable reception of his work, the absence of critical commentary on *Orpheus Descending* is both notable and curious.<sup>99</sup> *Orpheus Descending*'s failure to command attention from the critics of mainstream art publications might in part be attributed to its very success in inserting itself into the temporality of the public sphere, to partially disappear from consciousness. The critical reception that emerged was outside the mainstream art press. Class hostility masquerading as a mistrust of the mobile modern subject's ability to absorb or be absorbed by a work of art emerged in the critical reception that the work did receive. The particular nature of *Orpheus Descending*'s time, space, and audience—not its ostensible subject matter—were considered by both its critics and Pfeiffer to be the factors that defined the work and governed its success or failure.<sup>100</sup> On the electronic discussion list of maARTE (a webzine dedicated to issues concerning the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora),<sup>101</sup> the webzine's managing editor, Erna Hernandez, posted the following to the writer Christine Bacareza Balance:

---

<sup>99</sup> *John 3:16* was exhibited at PS1's Greater New York (2000), *Fragment of a Crucifixion (after Francis Bacon)*, and *The Pure Products Go Crazy* at the 2000 Whitney Biennial. Paul Pfeiffer was the first recipient of the Whitney Biennial Bucksbaum Award, an award worth \$100,000. This recognition, and a 2000–01 residency at the Whitney Museum of American Art that culminated in an exhibition of his work from December 2001–02 were thoroughly covered by art magazines such as *Artforum*, *Flash Art International*, *ARTNews*, *Art Newspaper*, *Frieze*, *Arttext*, *Art Monthly*, as well as the *New York Times*. A partial list of articles and reviews include David Joselit, "Terror and Form," *Artforum* 43, no. 5 (January 2005): 45–46.; Alois Kölbl and Johannes Rauchenberger, "A Void that Looks Back at You..." *Kunst und Kirche* pt. 2 (2004): 71–76; Paul Pfeiffer, "The Sun is God," *Tate Etc.*, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 90–93; Jennifer Gonzalez, interview with Paul Pfeiffer, "Paul Pfeiffer," *Bomb*, no. 83 (Spring 2003): 22–29. With the exception of brief asides, no reference to *Orpheus Descending* was made in any of these publications.

<sup>100</sup> Pfeiffer made this assertion at a public talk sponsored by MoMA at the Gramercy Theatre in May 2003.

<sup>101</sup> Pfeiffer is Filipino.

Pfeiffer continues to place the mundane products of our [contemporary commodity] culture into a context which offers them great significance....The true test of Pfeiffer's art will be to make Wall Streeters bother to stop and look.<sup>102</sup>

For Bacareza Balance, Pfeiffer's work would only have succeeded if its audience had stopped in its tracks and paid attention to the issue the commentator felt it focused on: the life cycle of food animals usually seen as dismembered, prepackaged commodities whose lives, and therefore deaths, are hidden from view. That this audience would do so was considered unlikely for Hernandez, given its professional (and implicitly its political) affiliation.

The art journalist Stephen Basilico, in a review published in *Time Out New York*, made a similar observation. Pfeiffer's work, Basilico wrote, would "never be seen by anybody...in its entirety," because its audience, "the shifting tide of commuters who pass through these buildings on a daily basis" would not stop to look, but instead walk "as quickly as their legs could carry them, away from their jobs toward home," and presumably in the other direction in the morning.<sup>103</sup> The failure of the public—or the audience—is here grounded in a distraction not produced by flopping down in front of a television set but by not flopping down at all, or not "stopping to look."

Basilico's response to the work is worth exploring at length. Unlike Pfeiffer, Basilico tells his readers that *Orpheus Descending* is "linear, unedited and doesn't run

---

<sup>102</sup> "Subject: Fwd: [maARTe] Paul Pfeiffer: *Orpheus Descending*." Posted on <http://pub16.ezboard.com/bmaarte> to Christine Bacareza Balance on Tuesday Apr 17, 2001 2:52 p.m. from Erna Hernandez.

<sup>103</sup> Stefano Basilico, "Just Another Day on the Farm: *Orpheus Descending* Suggests That We're all Caged in Our Hellish Routines," *Time Out New York*, June 7–14, 2001, 56.

as a loop.” Nevertheless, its linear structure calls attention to “the endlessly repeated routine of the commuters,” a loop these people are “doomed to repeat...until they retire.”<sup>104</sup> For Basilico, *Orpheus Descending* is not just a video, but “a complex interchange of people, technology and locale.” The commuters’ inability to absorb the video’s true meaning was a direct consequence of their cycle of labor. Because the commuters—the work’s intended audience—only catch glimpses of the video, little more is revealed to them, he argued, “than some chickens milling about.” Basilico did not think of it as a to-be-continued story (like a soap opera), producing different effects each time it was experienced. Consequently, in Basilico’s reading, the commuters are closed off from any insight into the work. Because, for Basilico, the average commuter lacks a sense of Pfeiffer’s broader project, the work will remain “elusive and confusing.” Basilico dismisses commuters as incapable of synthesizing an aesthetic experience through the Kantian exercise of relating the various experiences their senses receive to more fundamental concepts. Thus, *Orpheus Descending* failed for Hernandez and Basilico because it did not stimulate participation from the people who saw it. This is in part because of its viewers’ presumed sociopolitical profile, in part—and most importantly because the project failed to elicit attention from these passersby: “Wall Streeters” did not “bother to stop

---

<sup>104</sup> This implicit protest against the routines binding worker to an economy that appeared better suited to the machines than the labor force assigned to them is epitomized in an early example, Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 *Modern Times*. Chaplin plays a factory worker utterly incapable of coordinating his movements with the repetitive momentum of the post-Fordian production line. I need hardly point out the irony of this statement, given that both commuter routine and physical route were catastrophically and permanently interrupted by events that followed a few short months later, with the destruction of the World Trade Center and the deaths of thousands of its occupants when suicide terrorists turned the products of industrial society on itself by hijacking two commercial airplanes and flying them into the twin office towers that dominated the complex.

and look,” (Hernandez) but rather walked away from the work “as quickly as their legs could carry them” (Basilico). What neither Basilico nor Hernandez consider is that the very form of attention they feel prevented the audience from fully engaging with the work was *built into* it by Pfeiffer. Unlike his other work, Pfeiffer intended *Orpheus Descending* to be received in fragments over an extended period of time. In other words, he chose these spaces for their temporal as well as their spatial characteristics. And because of their problems with this temporal structure, Hernandez and Basilico failed to consider Pfeiffer’s desire to provide his audience with a mystery, an alternative to advertisements that would reveal itself over the repeated viewings that were made possible by the commuters’ regular movement through the space, without ever arriving at a conclusive ending.

Hernandez’s and Basilico’s problems with *Orpheus Descending* do not end with the work’s temporal structure. These critics also assume that its audience would not absorb the aspects of the work they identify as important: respectively, an awareness of the life cycle of meat poultry (for Hernandez), and the public’s critical engagement with art (for Basilico). Both criticisms presume for public art a didactic role, which transmits a particular “message” to be read by the public—its audience—raising the audience’s consciousness by teaching it about an issue, a role made impossible by *Orpheus Descending*’s submersion into the dreamlike state of distraction. What, then to make of Pfeiffer’s implicit position that *Orpheus Descending* was a political work, in that it established a space for either transgression or liberation, resulting in the alteration of consciousness?

According to the standards set by Hernandez and Basilico, the work was not political. The strategy of address, and its institutional frame exposed Pfeiffer's work to the same pattern of criticisms as those leveled against television shows and television architecture: all three had to contend with an audience incapable of rational thought. Pfeiffer's (and Douglas') public video works eluded most of the predictable framing devices that a spectator might rely on to locate the work as a work of art. In particular they did not lay bare their topics, their audiences, or their sites, as would a neo-Brechtian form of institutional critique. Rather, they produce densely layered palimpsests, whose meaning can only partially be resolved. In this, their work becomes an active, engaged dialogue with the commuter or the pedestrian. Rosalyn Deutsche's position on public art opens up a different interpretation of *Orpheus Descending*, as well as of Douglas' proposal for the psychiatric hospital in Zwolle. Deutsche avers that there is nearly universal consensus over the idea that "supporting things that are public promotes the survival and extension of democratic culture."<sup>105</sup> Arts administrators and city officials promote public art that solicits "participation" from "the people." Democracy is invoked in either consensual or controversial public artworks. Neoconservatives champion the rights of "the people's" access to public space in their attacks on "elitist" public art. It is because public artworks have a place in these debates, Deutsche asserts, not because they have a place in universally accessible public sites that defines them as forms of democratic expression. Following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Deutsche writes, "Politics...is about the

---

<sup>105</sup> Deutsche, 269.

constitution of the political community. It is about the spatializing operations that produce a space of politics.”<sup>106</sup> For Deutsche, political intervention makes space for politics, or the public sphere, not the other way around: “the political sphere is not only a site of discourse; it is also a discursively constructed site.” The logical consequence is that “conflict, division, and instability...do not ruin the democratic public sphere: they are the conditions of its existence.”<sup>107</sup> This form of political spatialization—the opening up of a space of conflict and debate—originates in a constitutive division, or a constitutive antagonism. It is crucial to this model that the conflictual makeup of society, politics and, ultimately, the public space, not be suppressed, as it is in models of consensus such as Habermas’.

*Orpheus Descending*’s engagement with political debate and subsequent entry into the public sphere emerges in the way that it frames movement. Like Douglas’ proposed work, *Orpheus Descending* was located neither in a public square nor in a public space designed for leisurely gatherings. Instead, it was placed in two locations that people move through quickly and repetitively. Intended to match the temporal rhythm of the commuters, the video did not require a sustained, conscious engagement but was seen “day after day in passing, a barely registering subliminal image.”<sup>108</sup> Critical to the work’s reception in a state of distraction were the two loops identified by both Pfeiffer and Basilico: the twice-daily ebb and flow of the audience

---

<sup>106</sup> Deutsche, 46.

<sup>107</sup> Deutsche, 47.

<sup>108</sup> “Public Art Fund presents... Artist Paul Pfeiffer’s *Orpheus Descending*: A video installation documenting the life-cycle of the chicken at the World Trade Center PATH Entrance,” Public Art Fund Press Release, [http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/release/pfeiffer\\_release.html](http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/release/pfeiffer_release.html) (accessed June 25, 2005).

and the seventy-five-day cycle of the work itself. By drawing the focal point of attention toward the otherwise unremarked-on movement of the audience, these loops foregrounded an ongoing, cyclical process, in which tens of thousands of people moved each day through public spaces whose primary function was transit.

Precisely this primacy of transit has been criticized. Just as critics of expanded television vilify its audience as empty-eyed consumers, incapable of the intellectual engagement required of the democratic process, so too critics of modernist architecture decry the erosion of democratic expression that they see taking place therein. The disconnect between the public good and public spaces, Richard Sennett points out, is a problem endemic to modernist urban design, which he characterizes as pockmarked with “dead public spaces.”<sup>109</sup> This is especially the case for International School architecture, where purported “public spaces” built into the design of this movement’s skyscrapers failed to continue the mandate of the public square. For Sennett, the form of “International-type skyscraper is at odds with its function, for a miniature public square revived in form, but the function destroys the nature of a public square, which is to intermix persons and diverse activities.”<sup>110</sup> Designed by Minoru Yamasaki, the World Trade Center was a late-International-style skyscraper.<sup>111</sup> Following its destruction in September 2001, many observers from the popular press noted that the ground-level spaces set aside in the complex design for public gatherings had instead replaced the city grid with a desolate concrete plain

---

<sup>109</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 12.

<sup>110</sup> Sennett, 12.

<sup>111</sup> Groundbreaking for construction took place in August 1966, and the ribbon cutting in April 1973.



whose traversal did not invite unplanned lingering above and beyond planned cultural events. In May 2002 the journalist Adam Nagourney wrote, “Given its...windswept isolation, the trade center had long been viewed as an obstacle....one of the first decisions about how to prepare the area for development was...to rectify what many people saw as an unfortunate byproduct of constructing the towers: the elimination of the street grid.”<sup>112</sup> Instead, the consistent presence of foot traffic could be found in the two spaces selected by Pfeiffer: the overpass between the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center and the platform between the great banks of elevators shuttling people between the PATH trains and their work destinations. Holston associates the modernist systems of pedestrian and vehicular traffic circulation with a greater privatization of social relations: that privatization allows greater control over access to space, which almost invariably stratified the public that uses it. The empty spaces and privatized interiors that result contradict modernism’s declared intentions to revitalize the urban public and render it more egalitarian. The singularity of function identified by Sennett in these spaces is one of uninterrupted movement: workers, itinerant delivery and service personnel, clients and consumers entering and exiting the skyscraper as quickly and expediently as possible. The possibility of stopping, lingering, or straying in the overpass or the platform becomes a potentially subversive or abject activity, to be viewed with suspicion. Holston makes a similar observation about modernist urban space: “When we analyze it in terms of what it

---

<sup>112</sup> Adam Nagourney, “Reimagining a Downtown,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2002. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A01E2D61130F933A25756C0A9649C8B63&sec=&spn=&pagewanted=1> (accessed September 12, 2006)

systematically set out to eliminate—the traditional street system of public spaces and the urban crowds and outdoor political domain of social life the street supports—its social consequence becomes clear.”<sup>113</sup>

While *Orpheus Descending* was described as public art by both Pfeiffer and the Public Art Fund, the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center were patrolled by security guards who had the authority to control who was allowed to be present. When I visited the two sites of Pfeiffer’s work, the dominant sound in the North Bridge overpass was the reverberation of voices as people conversed while walking. While some people glanced up to the monitor as they walked by—to see what I was looking at, not out of any intrinsic curiosity about the work—I attracted more attention than *Orpheus Descending* because I was out of place. Instead of walking purposefully, I was “loitering with a purpose” (taking notes) on the edge of the walkway. Like the overpass, the PATH train mezzanine was a transitional area. Unlike the overpass, there were two layers of people present: commuters and employees of the various businesses and public services such as the Hudson Newsstand employees, the Port Authority police, and a New Jersey PATH ticket seller. There too, because I was staying in one spot, I both felt conspicuous and drew attention from the other occupants of the space. Indeed, I attracted the suspicion of at least one Port Authority officer. A body at rest became a body out of place, potentially subversive to the mix of corporate, municipal, and state interests governing the ebb and flow of public movement in these transitional spaces.

---

<sup>113</sup> James Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship,” ed. Leonie Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 44.

Sennett locates the failures of the modernist public space in this combination of surveillance and movement. “The erasure of alive public space,” he writes, “contains an even more perverse idea—that of making space contingent upon motion...the public space is an area to move through, not be in.”<sup>114</sup> The consequence of the removal of any opportunity to loiter is the loss of democratic possibility: “as public space becomes a function of motion, it loses any independent experiential meaning of its own.” The active suppression of the potential for direct democratic expression is in this way built into the temporality of movement in mid-twentieth-century public spaces. The control and surveillance of movement, or the temporary versus the extended occupation of a given “common” space carries the latent potential of oppression that is both internalized and implemented by pedestrian and policeman.

The force of this observation has grown in recent years through the increasingly overt control of movement by state and corporate police forces. By trying to visit Pfeiffer’s *Orpheus Descending*, one draws attention to the everyday counterpart of the action required by the phrase, “move along folks, just move along, nothing to see here.” This familiar suggestion has been refined by the New York Police Department into a complex crowd-control system of barricaded walkways and “stop and release” herding pens. First tested at the 1998 New Year’s Eve celebrations in Times Square during the buildup to the millennium celebrations, they were subsequently implemented in mass demonstrations protesting the World Trade

---

<sup>114</sup> Sennett, 14.

Organization meetings in 2002, the looming war on Iraq in 2003, and the 2004 Republican convention.

Sennett's argument echoes Sorkin's plea that I refer to above for a return to an earlier, idealized moment of public spaces unpolluted by unipurpose, hermetically sealed spaces such as strip malls. Nevertheless, as Deutsche observes, the existence of the control over movement so aptly identified by Sennett does not necessitate his called-for return to a kind of public sphere, which was never more than a fantasy. The movement identified by Pfeiffer would not become public for Deutsche merely because it occurs in a place where the public happens to find itself. From the perspective of radical democracy, Deutsche envisions the discursive production of a public sphere through conflict, not consensus. The stakes in this discourse are realized, for Deutsche, in the front-cover illustration of Sorkin's book. An out-of-place group of Renaissance-style figures ascends an escalator in what appears to be one of Sorkin's "inward-looking" new television spaces that pose such a threat to democracy. Deutsche establishes an example of discursive construction when she talks about how the book's reader might receive the image:

How do images of public space create the public identities they seem merely to depict? How do they constitute the viewer into these identities? How, that is, do they invite viewers to take up a position that then defines them as public beings? How do these images create a "we," a public, and who do we imagine ourselves to be when we occupy the prescribed space?<sup>115</sup>

This image contains a critique of the present and a nostalgia for the past. Pfeiffer's work, on the other hand, does not shrink away from these expanded television spaces

---

<sup>115</sup> Deutsche, 286.

that promote the semidetached, dreamlike movement; rather it comes into conflict with the more totalitarian aspects of these spaces. With his title, Pfeiffer drew attention to multiple frames of audiences: first, he stresses the movement of the commuter ascending and descending the escalators. Second, he emphasizes the temporal structure that frustrates and then shuts out the fine-art audience (since the movement the work requires makes it next to impossible for anyone but a commuter to absorb). Finally, it makes the fine-art visitor aware of this movement, and its potentially totalitarian implications: necessary to continuing to move is the implicit threat of arrest.

## **2.6 Doug Aitken: *Sleepwalkers* (2007)**

Why is the attempt to control public movement intrinsically repressive? Democracy was made more or less equivalent to “the people” when all sovereign power was moved to the people—that is, within the social body. But to what does “the people” refer? And how is this power expressed? Thomas Keenan indirectly addresses this question when he formulates the public sphere as “structurally elsewhere, neither lost nor in need of recovery or rebuilding but defined by its resistance to being made present.”<sup>116</sup> Through the rhetorical figure of the phantom, Jacques Derrida shows how the impossibility of identifying the public makes it central to the democratic project. Derrida demonstrates the political potential of this impossibility when answering the

---

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Keenan, “Windows: Of Vulnerability” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), 135.

question, “what is public opinion?”<sup>117</sup> The expression of will, or public opinion, so often sought by pollsters and mass media becomes the delineation of the “silhouette of a phantom, the haunting fear of a democratic consciousness” that paradoxically legitimates a parliamentary democracy: “Literally *ephemeral*, it [public opinion] has no status because it does not have to be stable, not even constantly unstable....”<sup>118</sup> For Derrida, the public’s phantasmatic form is a result of its changeability, its resistance to governance. His questions regarding public opinion shape the indefinable nature of the public:

Exceeding electoral representation, public opinion is *de jure* neither the *general will* nor the *nation*, neither *ideology* nor the sum total of *private* opinions analyzed through sociological techniques or modern poll-taking institutions. One *cites* it, one makes it speak, ventriloquizes it...but this “average” [*moyenne*] sometimes retains the power to resist the means [*moyens*] “proper to guiding public opinion,” to resist this “art of changing” public opinion that, as Rousseau again says, “neither reason, nor virtue nor laws” have.<sup>119</sup>

Derrida considers public opinion’s fugitive nature to be a productive force rather than the downfall of a concept. This “resistance to being made present” emerges in the success of Pfeiffer’s piece at both addressing and drawing attention to the distracted, mobile public, and it is intrinsic to Douglas’s proposal. In both their duration and location Pfeiffer’s and Douglas’s public video works steadfastly inhibited Wollheim’s assimilatory, or “mastering,” paradigm of the spectatorial encounter. In doing so, they became attached to a form of movement in public spaces that does not permit the usual Kantian perception of a work of art. While dream states, nonlinear stories, and

---

<sup>117</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, ed. Michael B. Naas, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 84.

<sup>118</sup> Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, 84–85.

<sup>119</sup> Derrida, 87.

the merger of the body with larger or hidden systems are also characteristics of Doug Aitken's work, he does not provoke the discursive production of a public sphere. Unlike the works of Douglas and Pfeiffer, Aitken's spectacular installation brought the museum audience, or Wollheim's suitably informed and sensitive spectator, out onto the street when he extended his work into the spaces of expanded television.

Like Douglas (and Pfeiffer to a lesser degree), Aitken has enjoyed an extremely successful career, which has been built on a series of increasingly complex and sophisticated multichannel video installations. One of his more ambitious undertakings was the January 2007 installation *Sleepwalkers*, a work produced in partnership with Creative Time and the Museum of Modern Art. In this first work conceived and realized for the exterior of MoMA, gigantic images were projected onto the museum's south and west facades and across three of the interior walls surrounding the sculpture garden. Multiple characters appeared on the projections, and their interwoven stories converged and diverged like instruments in a musical arrangement. In its narrative structure the installation set out to reproduce the experience of urban living: "In *Sleepwalkers*, the city becomes a living, breathing body merging with the diverse and constantly changing individuals who make up the city....*Sleepwalkers* investigates the new and evolving relationships of contemporary urban life."<sup>120</sup> It did so using a technique that Aitken calls the "broken screen," in which he aims to capture realities that transcend the devices of linear narrative by using multiple screens.

---

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Klaus Biesenbach, "Building Images," in Klaus Biesenbach et al., *Doug Aitken: Sleepwalkers* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007): 6.

In *I Am in You* (2000), the video installation's exterior walls—usually left out of the artwork's aesthetic experience—became integral to its story. Five screens were installed inside a rectangular plywood box intended to remind the visitors of an oversized packing crate, or an undersized cargo container. Inside, the video starred a little girl who amused herself by playing cat's cradle with her friends, and drawing with a Spirograph. In an extreme close-up, the Spirograph merges with the girl's eye. Airplanes appear and vanish. The girl falls asleep. Her house, a prefabricated structure resembling the structure housing the video installation is lifted onto a truck and transported onto a highway at night. The house seems to have been cut in half to encompass the arteries of the traffic. Beginning from the container that the visitor enters and ending with the house on the truck, the installation becomes a series of nesting containers that are entered both literally and visually.

This emphasis on the architecture of the installation emerges in sharp relief in *Interiors* (2002), a multiscreen installation environment shaped like a Greek cross. The cross was made of translucent material that allowed the visitor to view the installation from both within and without. At the rear of three arms of the cross, three videos were projected. The fourth arm was open-ended, serving as an entrance for the visitors. At the cross' center was a white, donut-shaped couch. Visitors could move around the couch to watch a series of short narratives that appeared on the projections.

The three screens showed four seven-minute narratives that rotated around the four arms of the cross: this suited the nature of the videos shown in the installation,



which were less about duration than about simultaneity, lack of hierarchy, and the validity of any given moment. Typical of Aitken's process, all the narratives of *Interiors* shared momentarily repeated images that emerged across disparate city nightscapes shown on the multiple screens: similarly composed close-ups of hands, street signage, and traffic lights repeated across all three screens. Together they produced the impression that the four protagonists featured in the work were wading through one giant, globally connected megalopolis. This impression was reinforced aurally as well as visually: during each cycle, the soundtrack harmonized at specific instances. At the beginning of each cycle the audio tracks played softly. Gradually, they developed into an overlapping crescendo with increased speed.

The individual videos follow characters preparing for an activity: for example, a young woman walks through a city to meet a friend in a handball court. She changes in a locker room and plays a vigorous game that peaks in a string of grunts and shrieks as the ball is sent careening through the court. A man shows up for the night shift at a helicopter factory. Wearing a nylon coverall and blue rubber gloves, the character breaks into a tap dance in his designated workspace by the assembly line. In the third video, a character played by the musician André Benjamin (Outkast's André 3000) walks through a cityscape and stops in front of open water. Benjamin's sequence features increasingly surreal moments that move the narrative along. At a certain point Benjamin defies gravity and moves along the ceiling. His walk on the ceiling ends in a shot of petals and leaves that are carried along in his wake as he walks past. Benjamin's sequence climaxes with a rap that at times blurs

into a relentless string of syllables. The fourth video intercuts two narratives set in Tokyo: an auctioneer wanders through a deserted building at night, practicing his chant. He sits, tapping his fingers in an empty room with curved rows of seating and strips of neon. The auctioneer's segment crescendos when he breaks into incomprehensible auctionese. A young man drifts through emptied-out parking complexes and crosses media-rich Tokyo cityscapes to meet his girlfriend and their child at a waterfront. The sequence ends in front of a large pile of scrap metal at dawn with the man whispering incoherent words to his silent, motionless baby, who is held in a cocoon of blankets, strapped to the woman's chest.

Aitken's interest in architectural structures and interactions with urban environments extend beyond the gallery. In 2000, with *Glass Horizon*, Aitken projected a pair of eyes onto the facade of the Vienna Secession Building after it closed for the night. The projection, looking out over the Austrian capital, imbued the monumental building with the nervous motility of blinks and sideways glances. For Aitken's 2001 installation *New Ocean* at the Serpentine Gallery in London, the building housing the gallery was incorporated into his work. Aitken's use of both the volumes and surfaces of architecture in general and of museum spaces in particular was brought together in *Sleepwalkers*. Typically, the museum's structure divides the flow of pedestrians and commuters from the art inside. By including glass curtain walls and recessed balconies in his redesign of MoMA, Yoshio Taniguchi broke down some of these barriers and made it possible for the pedestrians and commuters to see museum visitors from the street and vice versa. When he was invited to

conceive of a public video work for MoMA, with *Sleepwalkers*, Aitken further engaged the possibilities opened up by Taniguchi's redesign, making the walls appear to dissolve. From the sculpture garden, *Sleepwalker's* audience could see through the projections into the museum. The museum staff members and visitors, lit from behind in the still-used offices and gallery spaces, became seamlessly integrated into the ongoing narrative of social isolation and mechanical integration lived by *Sleepwalkers'* protagonists. Conversely, the museum's occupants could see both the projections and the public in the garden. Office worker and museum visitor, hot dog vendor and security guard, their multiple, mundane realities became thus intertwined into virtual, dreamlike sequences. In an interview included in an essay on the work by Tom Vanderbilt, Aitken recalled that he could see, "'through the image during an early test projection,' a light in the office of someone working late and the janitorial staff cleaning after hours. 'For me that was so relevant,' he continued, 'seeing that level of reality blend through into the same image plane as fictional narrative.'"<sup>121</sup>

The simultaneous existence of virtual and actual, fiction and fact that has come to be understood as a commonplace of everyday existence through expanded television becomes central to Aitken's work. As Vanderbilt writes, "...one might consider *Sleepwalkers* as a kind of intervention in the changing psychogeography of the city, in which whole building surfaces come to life, actively making appeals to passersby, telling stories about themselves, or changing in response to fluctuating conditions."<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup>Tom Vanderbilt, "City of Glass," *Artforum* 45, no. 5 (Jan 2007): 46.

<sup>122</sup> Vanderbilt, 46.

This desire to animate the glass walls of the city, Vanderbilt suggests, proposes a new way of living with our buildings:

Aitken speaks of wanting “to fold Manhattan inside out and create a kind of architecture that is living and flowing, a waterfall of information and ideas.” He wants, in an act of seductive legerdemain, to make MoMA dissolve, to make it become what’s around it. Similarly, as in previous works, he envisions the human protagonists becoming one with the city around them, circadian rhythms syncing up with the hum of sodium-arc lighting. He moves toward a minimalist economy of images: hands twitching awake, bodies in motion...*Sleepwalkers* is a vanishing act of art and architecture, slipping behind and beyond the glass curtain.<sup>123</sup>

Thus the work’s setting, New York City, also serves as a point of departure for its content. Aitken chose locations that were both high profile and off-limits: the helicopter platform on top of the Met Life Building, the Atlantic Avenue Tunnel, the New York Transit Museum in Brooklyn, the Staten Island Skating Pavilion, the massive postal sorting center in Queens, the Landmark Sign Company where Times Square signs are repaired, and the obverse of the LED sign at 1 Times Square, a building whose revenue is generated by the electronic billboard that spans its facade.

Following “prototypical New Yorkers,” the narratives begin with the characters waking as night falls. Like *Interiors*, one person’s rituals parallel and sometimes synchronize with those of another person. Aitken imbues the banal moments of their jobs a surreal beauty, underscoring the paradox of isolation and intimacy in urban life. City functionaries, the stock New York characters in the installation narrative consist of a business executive (played by the actor Donald Sutherland), an office worker (played by the actor Tilda Swinton), a postal employee

---

<sup>123</sup> Vanderbilt, 46.

(played by the singer/songwriter Chan Marshall of Cat Power), a bicycle messenger (played by the street musician Ryan Donowho), and an electrician (played by the actor and musician Seu Jorge). The stories are told simultaneously and are woven together through daily occurrences, chores and rituals like waking up, or washing, but in very different environments and moments. In silent, parallel universes, all five awake, study their reflections, bathe, dress, and breakfast. They exit their apartments down endless corridors, pause in front of store windows, and commute to their respective jobs. Chan Marshall's character takes the subway to her decidedly blue-collar job as a mail sorter; Seu Jorge's character puts on a hardhat and unrolls electrical cable in front of MoMA's facade. Ryan Donowho rolls off someone else's couch, browses through a collection of old records and then leaves for his job as a bicycle courier. As each thirteen-minute video moves through the routines of characters, it builds up to increasingly dreamlike states of being. Tilda Swinton, playing an office worker, absentmindedly performs her ablutions, dozes in a taxi on her way to work and drifts through the deserted hallways of an office building. Her segment diverges from reality as she stands in a darkened room, entranced before the glowing lights and hypnotic movements of a monumental cluster of photocopiers. After leaving his residence furnished in high modernist style, Sutherland is chauffeured through the city in a Lincoln Town Car to a sparsely furnished office. At his narrative's climax, Sutherland's character is hit by a taxi. Instead of collapsing to the street, he breaks into a tap dance on the taxi's hood. The other narratives all crescendo in similar moments of private reverie. At the climax of their respective

segments, Marshall spins, Sufi-like, Jorge twirls a lariat, Swinton plays the violin, and Donowho drums a plastic bucket.

The projections were not all visible from one site and required the visitor to circle the museum complex in order to view all seven of them. While the work could be experienced from various perspectives, the multiplicity of narrative combinations discouraged all but the most dedicated of visitors from experiencing all the work's possible combinations.

Thelma Golden: The experience of the piece will be much like the way you experience so much of the city-you're doing it yourself, but other people are doing it around you as well.

Doug Aitken: Yeah, and I want to create a work that lets the viewer enter their own experience. That allows them to decide what vantage point they want to see something from, or if they want to walk around the block, or if they just don't like it and want to leave.<sup>124</sup>

Siting the work on the exterior walls of MoMA would seem to blur the boundaries between the museumgoers and passersby, art, and the kaleidoscope of billboards, news tickers, and plasma screens that hug and fenestrate the city's architecture.

Aitken rhapsodized about the associations between his work's content and its fragmentary reception by the commuter rushing by: "Ideally, it would be a piece that doesn't have a duration," he said. "Someone can pull up, double-park, see something, and take that concept away-as much as someone who wants to stand there for a half an hour and get lost."<sup>125</sup>

With the exception of the sidewalk on 53 Street, however, the choice of the viewer's location (the sculpture garden, the empty parking lot adjacent to the

---

<sup>124</sup> Thelma Golden, "Interview with Doug Aitken," *Interview* 37, no. 1 (2007): 244.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Vanderbilt, 45.

museum) established a different expectation of movement. Instead of adapting to the vernacular of the street, as Pfeiffer did and Douglas set out to do, Aitken's work transposed the museum visitor's practices of looking outside onto the sidewalk. In other words, the work solicited the role of the art spectator expounded on by Wollheim, who refers to three fundamental perceptual capacities that the artist relies on the spectator to have and to use: "seeing-in," "expressive perception," and the capacity for "visual delight." While for Wollheim, "seeing-in" is biologically grounded, he conceived the role of the artist as a conduit for this innate capacity, charged with directing and bringing it to a newly intensified focal point. This separates the function of "seeing-in" from other representational strategies, such as reading directional signs.<sup>126</sup> Wollheim stresses a mastering look, a "careful, sensitive, and generally informed scrutiny," which will extract from art the information needed to understand it. For this to succeed, "a spectator needs a lot of information about how the painting he confronts came to be made: he needs substantial cognitive stock." Looking at art needs attention. It needs focus. The viewing subject cannot absorb art in passing. Viewers came to midtown especially to visit the museum as well as Aitken's work. When they came, they stopped; they looked around; and they absorbed a work whose spectacular qualities mesmerized, bringing them to a standstill. Indeed, on 53 Street, the museum's visitors formed crowds on the sidewalk, creating an obstacle course for precisely the passersby that Aitken describes as his ideal audience.

---

<sup>126</sup> Wollheim, 129.

## 2.7 Conclusion

I have argued that given the intent of public art to command conscious attention, it has not for the most part engaged with the distracted user of the architectural infrastructure of expanded television. Consequently, by choosing to partially enter into the flow of public movement through the possibilities opened up by expanded television, Douglas and Pfeiffer do not reinforce a Habermasian ideal of consensus. Rather, their work (both realized and proposed), doubled and stood in for the experience of everyday life, creating a new model for thinking about the public. Deutsche began her essay “Agoraphobia” with a question: “what does it mean for space to be public?”<sup>127</sup> As my reading of expanded television in general and Pfeiffer’s and Douglas’s work in particular has demonstrated, drawing attention to public movement is also ideologically charged, and doing so offers the following ideas: Readings of both modern and contemporary spaces by Sennett and Holston characterize their uniformity of purpose as both repressive and antidemocratic. With Derrida’s notion of indirect expression, we come some way toward finding an answer to the question, what does it mean for movement to be public? As Derrida describes how the form of public opinion provides a silhouette of, or “ventriloquizes,” an otherwise-indistinguishable phantom, Pfeiffer and Douglas’s public video art temporarily gave shape to the circulation of the public by doubling it. They did not, however, harden the lines of the phantom public into some constituency or another, but rather they maintained its fluidity, its vagueness, its elsewhere-ness, its resistance

---

<sup>127</sup> Deutsche, 269.



to being made present. In doing so, they registered sediments of experience otherwise unclaimed by social or economic rationality.

### Chapter 3

#### Disjunctures in Institutional Time: The Museum and the Loop as a Temporal Form

When people first tried to sort out the impact of September 11 on the making of art, one idea that often came up was that the video medium more than any other would be changed for decades. How could it not? In the days following the tragedy, every network carried the same three-second moving image of a plane hurtling into a tower to create a ball of flame—and ran the segment again and again continuously, as if the event were always happening at that very instant. It was a national case of repetition compulsion: Reporters and viewers alike watched a newscast that was stuck in time, unable to accept the reality of an event and therefore constantly reliving it onscreen. Rarely, if ever, has editing mirrored an audience's tormented psychology so clearly. And, it was argued, video artists... would one day have to address the political, formal and emotional power that an editing technique had displayed to millions of eyes.

—Tim Griffin

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

—Anonymous

### 3.1 Introduction: Buildings and Routines

Like all institutions, galleries, museums, and art fairs are, in part, shaped by a set range of accepted practices and behaviors, as well as by their built environments. Through the official and unofficial behavior of ticket takers, guards and docents, as well as the structure of the public spaces where they work—specifically the entrance halls, bookstores, cafeterias, and, most importantly the exhibition spaces—permanent or temporary contemporary art institutions both describe and limit the manner in which they are used. In museums, this emerges through something as simple as the organization of public and private spaces. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill writes, the institution of a division between producers and consumers of knowledge assumes an

architectural form in the relations between the hidden spaces of the museum, where knowledge is produced and organized by the curatorial and administrative staff, and the museum's public spaces, where knowledge is offered to the museum-going public for its passive consumption, under the watchful eye of the docent and the guard.<sup>1</sup> And Tony Bennett describes the progression through museum spaces as "organized walking," wherein the conceptual or historical nature of an exhibit of anthropology, natural history, or art channels the viewer's attention by way of a "narrative machinery" to a conclusion that is reached after passing through successive galleries that make up an exhibit.<sup>2</sup>

The temporal and spatial demands of artworks influence both organized walking and exhibition spaces. While both the public museum and the discipline of art history were born in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the selection of objects to exhibit reaches back to cabinets of curiosity that proliferated throughout Europe in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Depending on its formal qualities as well as its original function, each object demands a different form of attention from the viewer. Ritual statuary, a suite of elaborately chased suits of armor, a collection of dolls, a reconstituted courtyard from seventeenth-century Spain, a diorama of North American mammals, a series of mid-twentieth-century photographs documenting city life in New York—all require a certain viewing distance and time for study. The formal component of how each work is looked at

---

<sup>1</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, "The Museum in Disciplinary Society," in *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan M. Pearce, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 180–181.

informs the way it is situated in its broader institutional context. The shape of the gallery the work is located in and, is just as important (or perhaps more so), the manner in which it is showcased to the public also determines how it is situated. These material and institutional pressures, in turn, ultimately shape or influence what is produced and how it is received.

Just as the meaning and function of objects manufactured before the emergence of the museum were altered by their introduction therein, media forms created after the invention of the museum—photography, film, and video—also change after entering the institution. Since the 1960s, “artistic” versions of these media have moved from other institutional locations into the museum. That “artistic” is defined in part by the museum, art gallery, and art fair is by now a truism. In *On the Museum’s Ruins*, Douglas Crimp writes,

[A]rt as we think about it *only came into being* in the nineteenth century, with the birth of the museum and the discipline of art history.... For us, then, art’s natural end is in the museum, or, at the very least, in the imaginary museum.... The idea of art as autonomous, as separate from everything else, as destined to take its place in *art* history, is a development of modernism.<sup>3</sup>

As Crimp asserts in his larger argument, the entry into the museum of media created after its birth and from a much broader context—in his example, photography—upsets the illusions necessary to the idea of the autonomous art object. Thus, the introduction of photography, film, and then video (as well as the evolution of the forms of their selection and display) depends, in turn, on a complex tangle of discursive, historical, and formal shifts. This chapter and the one that follows will

---

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 98.

examine in detail some aspects of the entry of film- and video-installation art into the museum. Specifically, it will explore how institutional pressures create film and video installations and how the presence of film and video installations influence both the museum and the experience of museum visitors.

This chapter focuses on what happens to the temporal form of moving images, primarily video, once it enters the museum through the byways of commercial galleries, art festivals, fairs and biennials. My interest in the interdependence of institution and object, however, takes its place within a wider body of literature that both critiques the museum as an institution and considers the relation between the art object and the viewer inside the museum. Crimp looks at the museum vis-à-vis the radical reevaluation of photography on the part of the art world in the 1970s. For photography to enter the museum—a modernist institution—it should have become severed from the broader possibilities of the medium. As Crimp writes, however, this requirement was not met, given that photography necessarily points to a world outside itself, a characteristic that places it in direct opposition to the very nature of the museum. “When photography is allowed entrance to the museum as an art among others, the museum’s epistemological coherence collapses. The ‘world outside’ is allowed in, and art’s autonomy is revealed as a...construction of the museum.”<sup>4</sup>

The curator Okwui Enwezor set out to bring the world into the museum in his design of the eleventh edition of Documenta, an international contemporary art exhibition staged every five years in Kassel, Germany. He accomplished this goal by

---

<sup>4</sup> Crimp, 14.

breaking Documenta XI up into platforms, or events and exhibitions in different parts of the world that were staged before and contemporaneous to the art fair. While, like Crimp, Enwezor sees the ideological limitations of the museum through the prism of its status as a modernist, and therefore hermetic institution, he attributes this failure not to the severance of a given medium—such as photography—from the outside world, but rather to the break between all objects from all their worlds that resulted from the exhibitionary model. Enwezor writes,

If the function of an artwork and the story it tells in an exhibition is to be understood primarily through the nature of its presentation, or by calling upon the context of the exhibition system to restore the temporal displacement that a work is often pressed into through the empirical logic of one thing standing next to another, this would also mean to establish the artwork's limits as such.<sup>5</sup>

Like Crimp, Enwezor describes a tension that exists between the artwork and its exhibition context. Unlike Crimp, he conceptualizes it as a temporal phenomenon, much the way that Martin Heidegger describes the displacement and subsequent falsification of the world brought about by the “nearness” of television. In his short essay “The Thing” (1950), Heidegger forecasts the philosophical consequences of technological change that appeared to bring things closer together temporally while maintaining their spatial separation: “the peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television, which will soon pervade and dominate the whole machinery of communication.”<sup>6</sup> A false “nearness,” or temporal-spatial relation disrupts an integral quality of the artwork in Enwezor's argument, and our bond with

---

<sup>5</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “The Black Box,” in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition, Catalogue*, exh. Cat. Okwui Enwezor et al., eds. (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002): 42.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 165.

the world in Heidegger's. The false temporality produced by the exhibition space brings about a tautological system, "into which the artwork is bound up in its own self-referentiality through the relationships established between mediums, objects and systems...." With these conditions in place, Enwezor continues, "there is no life for the artwork outside the system of art, no autonomy outside the framework of an *art exhibition*."<sup>7</sup> No matter what the vitality of any medium outside the institution of the museum, it is diluted by the temporal displacement of the museum's exhibition practices. Furthermore, "The artwork—which, in any case, is understood a priori to be extraterritorial to an exhibition's logic—functions as time spatialized, but only inside the space in which it is corseted, which does not refer to an external world."<sup>8</sup> The redress necessary to open an institution out onto the larger world, then, involves formally changing the physical and temporal structure of the museum itself and thereby its institutional time.

Enwezor extends this idea of institutional time into a dialogue between the museum and the outside world necessitated by both globalization and the fallout of 9/11. Others have taken up this idea of institutional time as it relates more narrowly to the experience of attending an exhibition. As I stated, Bennett conceptualizes the museum-going experience as a spatialized narrative, guiding the visitor from exhibition space to exhibition space. This culminates in a preconceived end-point, designed to edify and elevate the museumgoer. Edification and elevation were central to the museum's formative mission in the nineteenth century. Bennett describes the

---

<sup>7</sup> Enwezor, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Enwezor, 42.

museum as “an institution in which the working class—provided they dressed nicely and curbed any tendency towards unseemly conduct—might be exposed to the improving influence of the middle classes...”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the public museum was to be understood not only as a place of instruction but also as a reformatory of manners in which a wide range of regulated social routines and performances took place.

Crimp assigns a radically influential power to the relation between the entry of a new medium, photography, and an existing institution, the museum. This chapter also addresses the interrelation between the museum and the entry of a new medium, in this instance, film and video installation. How does a medium change after it enters the museum? Enwezor points out that the entry of objects into the museum changes their temporal relation to the world. Bennett describes how the temporal pressure of exhibition practices influences the behavior of its visitors. Each describes an aspect of the existence of institutional time forms. These time forms demonstrate the consequences of exhibition practices (Enwezor) and the shaping of public behavior (Bennett). How are these institutional time forms affected by the entry of film and video installation into the museum? How do the demands of the museum in turn alter film and video installation? The following section traces the events leading up to the emergence of video installation as a major force in contemporary art in the 1990s and considers the decidedly mixed reception of the genre in relation to this history.

---

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, 28.



### 3.2 Video's Entry into the Studio, Art Gallery, Art Fair, and Museum

While this section will concentrate on the period covering the institutionalization of video art, many other moving-image practices predate and parallel the emergence and maturation of video as an art-form. These “exceptions” date from George Méliès and the cinema of attraction to European surrealist and Dadaist filmmakers in the 1920s and 1930s and the mid-century film avant-garde in the United States. By the mid-1960s, many streams of ongoing moving-image practices in art existed, as Chrissie Iles makes clear in the catalog accompanying a major exhibition on early examples of moving image art, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977*. By organizing this section around the emergence and subsequent institutionalization of video art, however, I am tracing a self-conscious “birth of a medium” that dominated the moving image in art in the 1970s and the 1980s, a period that closely links avant-garde practices to the moving image. This period also overlaps with a transition toward institutional centrality *and* consequent changes in film and video installation's temporal form.

The time lag between the development in 1965 of the Sony Portapak (the first widely available portable video camera), its early adoption by artists, and video's successive entry into the art gallery, art fair, and the museum is astonishingly short. A review of press releases from the Museum of Modern Art, as well as a chronology of exhibition catalogs including video from the mid-1960s onward—especially Documenta catalogs—tells a story of a progress from the margins to the center. This movement takes several forms. As part of a transformation of urban geography, video

emerges and develops in SoHo in the mid-1960s, the area south of Houston Street in New York City, at the time a “new” art neighborhood. Video’s migration from provinces to cultural capital started with its first patrons, regional museums—which were located away from the broadly recognized (especially by itself) international art center of New York City. There was also a movement from margin to center within institutions that style themselves as the arbiters of what constitutes modern or contemporary art. Here, I mark this movement in terms of both the activities that take place within the museum and the spaces that house them. Video first enters the museum as the subject of artist’s talks or as part of screening series held in rooms tucked far away from the major exhibition galleries. At a certain moment, video explodes into the “primary” exhibition spaces, and from there it rapidly evolves into one of the dominant media found in contemporary galleries, art fairs, and biennials, in many instances eclipsing painting. The approach of institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art or the Whitney Museum of American Art initially appears as a paradox: torn by their status as arbiters of what constitutes modernity, postmodernity, and the contemporary, they act to stamp their imprimatur on an art form only after it has been patronized by institutions with a lower profile and narrower scope of cultural influence.

Video art was first adopted by artists who settled SoHo. In 1971 New York City’s planning commission adopted zoning amendments that authorized the conversion of underutilized loft buildings to artists’ live-work quarters. The lofts were housed in old factories that had been originally built to accommodate light

manufacturing industries in New York City. The zoning amendment was intended to balance the needs of the artists moving into SoHo with the area's remaining manufacturing and warehouse users. In 1976 the district was extended to include NoHo, or north of Houston Street. At the time these lofts were considered a radical new step in both art production and exhibition, and of a piece with the art that was being produced within them. Video art's first home in the United States lies in these lofts—its users, including radical television collectives, postminimalists, Fluxus and performance artists, all established themselves here. In a catalog for a 1976 German exhibition designed to mark the bicentennial of the United States, René Block writes that the relation between SoHo, video, and performance art at the time was mutually beneficial. While video and performance art, he argues, stand out as SoHo's contributions to contemporary art, they “incontestably molded a new SoHo aesthetic....”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, between 1965 and 1975 SoHo evolved into the center in New York City for contemporary artists because of money that flowed there from granting institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the New York State Council for the Arts. For Block,

This direct support explains the lead enjoyed by American artists in performance dance and music techniques and the take-for-granted way in which video has been integrated... Probably nowhere in the world is there such a concentration of electronics in the area of arts as there is in SoHo (the studio of Nam June Paik and Shigebo Kubota has more video hardware at its

---

<sup>10</sup> René Block, “Square Map SoHo. Europe in SoHo. Alex—or the Spirit of SoHo,” in *New York, Downtown Manhattan, SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film* exh. cat. Eds. René Block, Ursula Block, Kurt Thöricht (Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976), 15.

disposal than all the exhibiting cultural institutes of West Berlin put together).<sup>11</sup>

The concentration of artists in SoHo not only resulted in significant government and foundation support, and a (comparatively) high level of sophistication and intensive focus on technological experimentation in video, but also in a move southward by most art galleries, from the area on and around 57 Street, to SoHo.<sup>12</sup> Stephen Koch wrote that by 1970, the major uptown galleries such as Leo Castelli, Ilene Sonnabend, and Andrei Emmerich had either moved downtown or opened satellite galleries in SoHo. Coinciding with this move, according to Koch, was a shift in emphasis away from the traditional media of painting and sculpture toward film, video, and performance “as crucial to an avant-garde which had previously been officially understood to encompass primarily painting and sculpture. And so, it seemed, SoHo would represent a new era for art, as well as for where artists lived.”<sup>13</sup> For Crimp, there is not so much an association between the emergence of a neighborhood and a medium as there is the development of a time-based medium that helps defines a decade and that replaces painting:

[D]uring the 1960s, painting’s terminal condition finally seemed impossible to ignore. The symptoms were everywhere: in the work of painters themselves...in minimal sculpture...in all those other mediums to which

---

<sup>11</sup> Block, 19.

<sup>12</sup> A notable exception to this migration southward by gallerists patronizing video art was Howard Wise. *TV as a Creative Medium*, the first exhibition in the United States devoted exclusively to video art, was presented in 1969 at his eponymous gallery on 57 Street. The show emphasized television sets as sculptural forms and the machinery of video rather than its images. Most notably, Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider showed *Wipe Cycle* (1969), a pioneering television installation that consisted of nine monitors arranged in a grid. This early “video wall” combined both live and delayed coverage of the comings and goings in the gallery, intercut with ongoing commercial television programs.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Koch, “Reflections on SoHo,” in *New York, Downtown Manhattan, SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film* exh. cat. eds. René Block, Ursula Block, Kurt Thöricht (Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976), 109.

artists turned as, one after another, they abandoned painting. The dimension that has always resisted even painting's most dazzling feats of illusionism—time—now became the dimension in which artists staged their activities, as they embraced film, video, and performance.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, SoHo both defines and is defined by the avant-garde's declaration of the death of painting.

The moment that was defined by the emergence of portable video technology, the development of SoHo as a viable neighborhood for a new art community, the new focus within the United States on video and film as an avant-garde art form, and the emergence of performance art was recognized as both fleeting and vulnerable to institutionalization. Douglas Davis describes how this moment became a victim of its own success:

SoHo is simply a site. Video is simply a tool. Their coming together is a grand historical mistake (the chic art community coming to public attention at virtually the same hour with a radicalizing means), preceded by beginnings in film and Fluxus, both vagabond activities. Since then, both site and the tool have acted as microcosms for larger conflicts, between the reality of art-making and the lens through which it is viewed. My pessimism about the future is unbounded. So is my wonder at the achievements of the past. What lies ahead—under inexorable social and political pressure—is breakage and disbursal. The “critical mass” that made SoHo important between 1967 and 1976 is about to loosen, and take residence elsewhere. The esthetic left is about to surrender, I think.<sup>15</sup>

The mourning over a lost moment and place is palpable in this text. What also emerges is a sense of resignation about the inevitable progression of experimental film and video from avant-gardist spaces to institutional legitimization.

---

<sup>14</sup> Crimp, 92–93.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Davis, “SoHo du Mal: Video, Film,” in *New York, Downtown Manhattan, SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film* exh. cat. eds. René Block, Ursula Block, Kurt Thöricht (Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976), 231.

In addition to the groundswell of activity in New York City in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, alternative exhibition spaces that supported video art proliferated throughout the United States and Canada. On the West Coast these included the Video Inn in Vancouver, La Mamelie in San Francisco, the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions. Art schools like the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, the San Francisco Art Institute, and the University of California at San Diego integrated video into their curricula, in the context of experimental film and performance art. Exhibitions featuring video art also took place in smaller regional museums elsewhere in the United States, including the Ohio State University College of the Arts in Columbus; the Pomona College Art Gallery in Claremont, California; the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; Media Study in Buffalo, New York; and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston.<sup>16</sup> In 1975, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia organized a major international exhibition, *Video Art*, which surveyed single-channel video and video installation art from North America, South America, Japan, and Europe.

Some catalog essays that resulted from these exhibitions explicitly set out to situate video art in an art-historical context. In the forward to the catalog accompanying Frank Gillette's 1978 *Aransas: Axis of Observation*, exhibited at the

---

<sup>16</sup> For example: College of the Arts, *Interactive Sound and Visual Systems* exh. cat., text by Charles Csurí (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970); Pomona College Art Gallery, *William Wegman: Video Tape, Photographic Works, Arrangements* exh. cat. (Claremont, Calif.: The Gallery, 1971); Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, *Art video confrontation '74* exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'art moderne, 1974); Art Gallery of Ontario, *Videoscape: An Exhibition of Video Art* exh. cat. (Toronto: Education and Extension, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1974).

Contemporary Arts Museum in Texas, museum director James Harithas draws a lineage for Gillette beginning with the nineteenth-century realist Gustave Courbet. Gillette's work, for Harithas, "espouses a realism which recalls Courbet's scientific naturalism—descending through associations between Gillette's work and Cezanne's 'relational series of overlapping planes,' to Claude Monet and then finally Barnett Newman."<sup>17</sup> Other essays chose to explain video art through mass culture, specifically broadcast television. In the catalog accompanying the 1978 exhibition *New Video and Performance Art in Detroit*, the curator Jay Belloli situates the emergence of video in relation to the incorporation of mass-cultural artifacts by contemporary pop art painters such as Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Lichtenstein.<sup>18</sup> And in the catalog to the 1983 exhibition *Watching Television: A Video Event*, John Hanhardt wrote that the viewer's perception of video art was largely determined by the role television had come to play in the form of an entertainment and information industry, which was in turn shaped by the marketplace of corporate capitalism.<sup>19</sup>

Most notably, the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, and the Long Beach Museum of Art in Long Beach, California, maintained sustained video-exhibition programs that were supported by ancillary research institutes. In 1972, with funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, the Everson Museum

---

<sup>17</sup> James Harithas, "Foreword," Frank Gillette, *Aransas: Axis of Observation* exh. cat. (Houston, Texas: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1978), 2–3.

<sup>18</sup> Jay Belloli, "Preface," The Detroit Institute of Arts, *New Video and Performance Art in Detroit Works in Progress V*, exh. cat. (Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1979): 4.

<sup>19</sup> John Hanhardt, "Watching Television," School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, *Watching Television: A Video Event* exh. cat. (Urbana-Champaign: School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1983), 7.

established the first video department in a museum in the United States.<sup>20</sup> David Ross was appointed the first video curator, before leaving to become the deputy director for film and television at the Long Beach Museum of Art in 1974.<sup>21</sup> The Everson Museum maintained relationships with Synapse, an editing facility located in Syracuse, New York as well as the Experimental Television Workshop in Binghamton, New York. In addition to the Southland Video Anthology (1975, 1976-77), the Long Beach Museum of Art also featured video art in group exhibitions such as Videothos: Cross-cultural Videos by Artists (1979), Roles, Relationships, Sexuality, Shared Realities: A Cultural Cable Series (1983), A Passage Repeated, A Passage Repeated (1985), Video: A Retrospective: Long Beach Museum of Art, 1974-1984 (1984), Video Poetics: A Presentation of the Long Beach Museum of Art (1990) and Choice Encounters (1992), as well as solo exhibitions such as Framed: A Video Installation by Bruce and Norman Yonemoto (1989).

---

<sup>20</sup> A representative sampling of artists and shows organized by Everson include Shigeko Kubota, and Work from Experimental Television Center (1972), Circuit: A Video Invitational (1973, traveled in 1974), Frank Gillette Video Process and Meta-Process (1973), Videa 'n' Videology: Nam June Paik (1974), Video and the Art Museum (three day workshop/seminar, April 4th, 5th and 6th, 1974), Everson Video 75, Installations and Performance Works by Ant Farm, CAST (Community Video), David Cort, Dance Media (live performance work by Joanne Kelly, Skip Sweeney of Video Free America, Jane Miller), Dimitri Devyatkin, Dieter Froese (Restage, February 1-23), Electron Movers; Beryl Korot, Shigeko Kubota, Andy Mann, Paul Ott and Fred Kessler, Walter Wright of the Experimental Television Center, Peter Van Riper and Bill Viola (all 1975), The Dreme Style of Michael Butler, Information, Works and Activities exhibition by the Experimental Television Center (all 1976), New Work in Abstract Video Imagery, WGBH New Television Workshop Showcase. Works by Ros Barron, Donald Burgoyne, Peter Campus, Brian Connell, Frank Gillette, Robert Goldman, Ron Hayes, Tava Hudson, Andy Mann, Jo Sandman, TVTV and William Wegman were screened. In conjunction with this exhibit, in October 1977 WCNY TV 24 aired a sixty-minute composite of these selections and others produced by the WGBH Workshop from 1973 to 1977. Southland Video Anthology 1976-77, Jamie Davidovich "Argentinian" video surveillance installation, Skip Blumberg and John Margolies, "Resorts of the Catskills," Aldo Tambellini exhibited video and photographs (all 1977). "Resources: Groups," *Video History Project*, <http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/groups/gtext.php3?id=33> (accessed September 28, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> He then became the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The Everson Museum video department closed in 1981.



In the museums widely regarded as primary arbiters of contemporary art within the United States, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, video art arrived through three methods: from the fringes of the museum's program of activities, under the guise of sculpture, and as part of group exhibitions focusing on large themes that incorporate video alongside other media. As part of a 1968 exhibition considering the broader theme of the machine, two videos by Nam June Paik (*McLuhan Caged* and *Lindsay Tape*) were included in an exhibition at MoMA, *The Machine Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*. *Lindsay Tape* consisted of an excerpt from a televised press conference given by John Lindsay, then the mayor of New York, where he said: "As soon as this is over, you may start recording." By sliding magnets across the monitor, viewers were able to distort Lindsay's features. For the exhibition at MoMA, Paik set an open-reel, half-inch play-back deck on the floor several feet away from a sewing-machine bobbin and spool, and then ran the spliced tape between them. This configuration anticipated both the yet-to-be-developed videocassette and the ubiquity of the loop from the 1990s onward. In 1970, MoMA included videotapes from the United States, Europe, and Latin America in Kynaston McShine's multimedia exhibition *Information*. A videotape recording booth was set up in MoMA by the Argentine Group Frontera. At the booth visitors answered questions in front of a video camera and then watched themselves on television screens in both "real" time and "time delay." In 1974 Fred Barzyk, Douglas Davis, Gerald O'Grady, and the MoMA film department director Willard Van Dyke organized a major conference, *Open Circuits*, on the future of

television.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in 1983, MoMA hosted a major traveling show, *The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties*, which was identified at the time by a reviewer for *New York* magazine as the first, and possibly the most ambitious, traveling exhibition of video art to date.<sup>23</sup>

A sustained focus on video “as video” emerges with *Projects: Video*, a series curated by Barbara London (a longtime advocate of the moving image at MoMA), in September 1974. While that focus had been initiated at MoMA in 1971 with an environmental-video installation by Keith Sonnier (which I look at in detail below), the bulk of the series consisted of screenings organized by London.<sup>24</sup> They were held first in the Auditorium Gallery, and later in a dedicated gallery.<sup>25</sup> In 1984 London curated another retrospective exhibition on video at MoMA, *Video Art: A History*. A review of this exhibition by Lucinda Furlong in *Afterimage* summarizes the criticisms of MoMA’s attempt to establish the history of an art form that was, at the time, less than twenty years old:

Any exhibition that attempts to present a history of one art form is bound to be controversial, and whoever curates it becomes an easy target for criticism. Barbara London, the Museum of Modern Art’s video curator, has put herself into an even more precarious position since she has embarked on the relatively uncharted waters of video art....Beyond the immediate issues of what was

---

<sup>22</sup> Proceedings from this conference were later edited by Douglas Davis and Alison Simmons and published as *The New Television: A Public/Private Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Kay Larson, “Through a Screen, Dimly,” *New York*, September 12, 1983, 86–87.

<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the occasional installation was also included in this series: Shigebo Kubota’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1978), Terry Fox’s *Room Temperature* (1980), Allan Scarrit’s *Seven From Three (for go)* (1981), and Barbara Steinman’s *Icon* (1990).

<sup>25</sup> Museum of Modern Art press releases refer to both the Auditorium Gallery and the Video Gallery: March 1978. February 1979 “*Projects: Video XVI*,” January 1980, “*Fields of Blue: Nan Hoover’s Video Installation on View at MoMA*”

included and how it was presented looms the question of the implications of video being singled out as a separate and autonomous “medium.”<sup>26</sup>

In her lengthy review, Furlong summarizes some of the debates that defined the later discourse on early video: questions over who could categorize the forms of video and skepticism over its restriction to a category separate from the other media forms it developed alongside.

In my review of some of these debates in chapter 1, I focus on video as an extension of or a commentary on television, its placement within institutional contexts such as television stations and research centers, and its support by philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation. The complications involved in attempts to place video art on television, however, do not fully describe the range of activities that took place in the transitional period between video’s “utopian moment” (late 1960s–early 1970s) and its current status as a dominant medium in contemporary art.

For example, artists who integrated video into a larger sculptural practice, such as Lynda Benglis, Keith Sonnier, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra, brought video into the museum not as an art form unto itself but as one sculptural material among many.<sup>27</sup> These artists are historically identified as “process,” or postminimalist, artists. When they first emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were identified as a group through their preference for a heterogeneity of materials, a willingness to integrate space into their sculptural practice, and an

---

<sup>26</sup> Lucinda Furlong, “Raster Master,” *Afterimage* 11, no. 8 (March 1984): 17.

<sup>27</sup> This notwithstanding London’s categorization of the work of Keith Sonnier as video in her essay included in *The New Television*, the text that resulted from Open Circuits, an international conference on the future of television held at the Museum in 1976.

emphasis on the process of making and receiving the artwork. Through this latter emphasis, many of these artists extended their work to actively incorporate the corporeal experience of the museumgoer as well. While a shift in emphasis takes place away from many sculptural materials to the privileging of one, in reviews a strong resemblance emerges between these works and contemporary film and video installations such as Doug Aitken's *Electric Earth* (1999), and Pierre Huyghe's *Streamside Day Follies* (2003). The Keith Sonnier installation at MoMA from 1971 (*Untitled*) exemplifies some of these parallels.

Sonnier had been given two rooms to work with. The lintel of the doorway to the first room was dropped to four feet, forcing adults to crouch down before entering. In an article published in *Artforum*, Kenneth Baker writes that after entering, he immediately bumped his head when trying to straighten himself. Sonnier had decreased not only the height of the doorway but the ceiling of the entire room to approximately four feet:

[O]r so it appeared at first. At the far end of the now shallow room, there was an opening in the lowered ceiling, a rectangle of perhaps four by five feet through which bright red light poured from above. One naturally sought that position in order to be able to stand up and because it promised something else to see.<sup>28</sup>

On reaching the rectangular opening, the museumgoer saw that the top half of the gallery space was bathed in the red light and empty, with the exception of a small television camera, whose lens was trained on the space where the visitor's head would inevitably pop up. Two projected images of the resulting video were

---

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Baker, "Keith Sonnier at the Modern," *Artforum*, 10, No. 2 (October 1971): 80.

transmitted from the smaller gallery to the second, larger gallery, filling two opposite walls in the larger gallery with positive and negative versions. For Baker,

The choice of this image was perhaps the most pleasing aspect of the piece; if one wanted to apply illusionism to the limits of a real space such as a room, and if projections filled the two walls, then there could hardly have been a more appropriate image to use than that of another entrance to a real space, an image which repeats the nature of illusionism itself.<sup>29</sup>

Sonnier treats video as a component that has a transformational influence on and is integral to an installation. While his work remains defined by Baker as sculpture, the critical work of the essay is devoted to elaborating how the video projections of the action in the first room playing in the second room function as a successful challenge of pictorialism, or the transformation of two-dimensional space into an illusion of three-dimensional space:

Sonnier's piece consisted simply in his devising a situation of constant mediation for the experience of seeing and being seen by other people given the fact that a literally immediate pictorial space is possible with the proper use of video equipment.<sup>30</sup>

When viewed from the present, what emerges is how firmly embedded the defining characteristics of film and video installation are in postminimalism, or process art—the choreography between galleries and moving images, the debates over pictorialism, and considerations of how these elements influence the shift in the qualitative experience of temporality experienced inside the galleries housing the film and video installation art. Aitken's *Electric Earth*, Batsry's *Set*, and Huyghe's *Streamside Day Follies* placed the audience at the center of their respective

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 248.

installations. Aitken's *Electric Earth* established a highly nuanced choreography between the moving image, the gallery space and the audience. All, however, are grouped under a broader repudiation of these later installations' use of "pictorialist" moving images, an anachronistic descriptive that I take up at length in the next chapter.

Notwithstanding the place of video—and the moving image more broadly—as media of choice for the avant-garde in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the speed at which film and video installation overtook the more traditional media of painting and sculpture at a certain moment in the 1990s as *the* central medium in large-scale institutions is breathtaking. The quickest way to survey this is through a review of Documenta catalogs, both because Documenta takes place every five years and because of its status as a lightning rod for reactionary criticism.<sup>31</sup> In 1977 Documenta VI introduced video for the first time, alongside photography and film. In the catalog, and we may assume, at the exhibition, video was organized into two sections: out of a total of 396 artists, 63 video artists were included, from which 50 were single-channel videos shown in a Videoteck and 13 videos were installations, scattered throughout the exhibition spaces, by artists such as Vito Acconci, Rebecca Horn, Joan Jonas, Friedrike Pezold and Ulrike Rosenbach. In the accompanying essay, Wulf Herzogenrath uses the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, as well as the history of video in Europe and the United States up to that point, to account for the inclusion of video in Documenta.

---

<sup>31</sup> One problem with this methodology is that each Documenta has a different curator, with a different view of the relative importance of various media.

In Documenta VI, photography, film and video works considerably outnumbered painting and sculpture. In Documenta VII (1982) however, while artists such as Vito Acconci, Marina Abramovic/Ulay, Dan Graham, Joan Jonas, Martha Rosler, and Dara Birnbaum were represented, the balance had shifted back to more traditional media. This was also the case in Documenta VIII (1987). A more substantial number of single-channel videos were exhibited in Videoteck, and “video sculptures” (Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Shigeko Kabuto, and Nam June Paik) were grouped with other media in the main section of the catalog, and shown in the primary galleries of the exhibition.

For London, video’s rapid ascendancy on the international art scene and in the commercial galleries in New York in the 1990s is attributable to two factors: the maturation of video as an art form and the coincidental pressure of economics:

The maturity that video as an art form had attained by the early 1990s was evident at the international survey exhibition Documenta IX, in Kassel, Germany, in 1992. Unlike Documenta VII (1982) or Documenta VIII (1987), the numerous video installations here were on an equal footing [we may presume, aesthetically] with painting and sculpture throughout the many pavilions.<sup>32</sup>

Significant here is the association drawn by London between the development of video as an art form and its equal stature with painting and sculpture in the pavilions that made up the art exhibition. In Documenta IX (the exhibition identified by London as the one where video takes its place beside painting and sculpture), a new wave of moving-image artists, Matthew Barney, Mari José Burki, Ernst Caramelle,

---

<sup>32</sup> Barbara London, interview by John Johnston, “From Video to Web: New Media Yesterday and Tomorrow—An Interview with Barbara London,” *Art Papers*, November/December 2001, 25–26.

Stan Douglas, Vera Frenkel, Rodney Graham, and KeunByung Yook, as well as artists from earlier generations—Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Tony Oursler, Dara Birnbaum, and Bill Viola—were represented.

London tells the backstory of the rise of film and video installation in a salty, acerbic interview given in 2001 in *Art Papers*. For London, with improvements in projection technology, video developed into a more visually sensuous medium: “Once something very rough and scrappy, video got bigger and more deluxe at the same time that painting got bigger and juicier with David Salle and all.” In the 1990s, developments and improvements in exhibition technologies (the maturation of digital video, the commercial viability of projection) made video’s image quality visually more congruent with film. The lines between the media blur, making it difficult to sharply distinguish cinematic from video practices in the museum, especially because some nominally video artists take on the conventions of film: on the one hand, they are filmmakers, or artists who have transported the conventions of narrative cinema into the museum, by virtue of budget and complexity. On the other, they are not filmmakers, because they use the “language” of video art, playing with temporality, simultaneity, duration, audience expectation, and the relation between exhibition space and art work.

Contemporaneous with this aesthetic and technological transformation was an economic depression in the art market that suddenly made video a more attractive, that is, a cheaper commodity than painting:

Barbara London: You had a sort of little economic boom, and then it bottomed out again, and it was pull up your socks time, and people got back to



basics...And when the market was down in the early 90s, I remember [the New York art dealer] Barbara Gladstone doing a show that included the work of Dara Birnbaum, Bruce Nauman, and a few others. I don't think Barbara would ever have done video in the 80s, but because the bottom had fallen out, she put this little show together and attracted more than she had attracted in her life there in SoHo. So it was interesting to think there was that moment. And it certainly picked up again.<sup>33</sup>

The attraction held by video survived after this dip. In the 1992 Documenta, out of a total of 196 artists, 53 painters were represented, compared with 8 video installation artists and 3 video artists showing single-channel videos in a screening room. By the mid-1990s, in London's words, video in general and video projections in particular satisfied the artworld's

feeding frenzy over the "new-new-new." Everywhere you looked, there were more artists, more museums purchasing contemporary art and producing international survey shows, and more private collectors building larger homes to house more art. Competition, in a word, was fierce.<sup>34</sup>

Not only did film and video installation slake an appetite for novelty, it also appealed to an interest in new technologies. London related that MoMA became increasingly interested in technology in the 1990s, which coincided more generally with a greater openness to art that stressed installation and interactivity. These elements were satisfied by large-scale film and video installations: in 1995 London curated a show, Video Spaces, where eight installations by artists such as Tony Oursler, Bill Viola, and Stan Douglas filled a floor of the museum. And in a clear shift in emphasis from the previous edition, in the 1997 Documenta, out of a total of 115 artists, 6 painters were represented alongside approximately 40 moving-image artists. Documenta was

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 25–26.

not alone in this tilt toward film and video installation: “in a Biennial,” concluded London in the 2001 interview, “it’s very natural now to have a video installation, and it used to be an anomaly.”<sup>35</sup> This new prominence is also evident in the artists chosen for awards: video installations won the Turner Prize awarded by the Tate Gallery in 1996 (Douglas Gordon), 1997 (Gillian Wearing), and 1999 (Steve McQueen); top awards at the Venice Biennale went to Pippilotti Rist in 1997, Doug Aitken and Shirin Neshat in 1999, and Pierre Huyghe, together with Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, in 2001; finally, in 2000 the inaugural Bucksbaum awarded at the Whitney Biennial went to Paul Pfeiffer, and then in 2002 to Irit Batsry.

The movement of film and video installation in the United States from SoHo loft to commercial gallery, from commercial gallery to regional museum, from regional museum to art-capital lecture hall, from lecture hall to ancillary gallery, and finally from ancillary gallery to main pavilion spatializes the narrative of this art form’s shift from the margins to the very center of contemporary art. As catalogs of international art exhibitions demonstrate, the speed of this move accelerated dramatically in the 1990s. By 1998, as the art critic Roberta Smith remarks in a feature article in the *New York Times*:

The Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman, understandably biased, defined sculpture as something you bump into when you look at a painting. These days painting may be in danger of becoming something you lean against when you pause to look at a videotape....The baby of the camera arts has come a long way since 1965, when the first portable video camera appeared in stores and a handful of artists started exploring what technology had wrought. At first, the bulk of videotape-as-art was made by people closer to the world of film than to art. Over the next few years, some names began to

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

emerge...But their work was hard to find; in museums it was usually relegated to darkened rooms that visitors could avoid or overlook.

Today, you don't have to go out of your way to see video art....In the last decade—maybe even in the last few years—video has become an unavoidable, if not ubiquitous, fact of artworld life, prominent in museums and commercial galleries, and increasingly, in collectors' homes.<sup>36</sup>

In 2002 the *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl ruminated on the history of the current status of video:

I think the current hot thing is video, which is indeed enjoying a kind of flowering. There are any number of artists doing extraordinary things. Which is interesting. Video technology became viable around '66 or '67. Bruce Nauman immediately did a number of definitive videos, sort of tracing the parameters of the aesthetics. Then video just went around bumping into things for the next 25 to 30 years. That's typical of new technologies, by the way. For a new technology to go past the point of novelty to where it is a matter of fact artist's tool takes two or three generations. Now, video's a tool in the artist's kit like pencils and brushes. There are a number of artists doing terrific things with it. The next development, if flat screen technology becomes economical, it solves the problem of commercialization for videos.<sup>37</sup>

And in 2002 Mark Nash (a former editor of *Screen*) wrote in the catalog accompanying Documenta XI:

Artists' film and video has emerged as a major if not dominant moving image discourse in the museum and gallery circuit: avant-garde and experimental moving image practices are reconfigured and restaged; Hollywood narratives are reworked and represented (Pierre Huyghe, Douglas Gordon) in forms of critical or cynical pastiche....New kinds of cinema are being developed, entailing new visual and sonic conditions in the production of subjectivity....<sup>38</sup>

While close attention has been paid to the new manifestations of projected screen media, as the recent publication of books such as *Broken Screen: 26 Conversations*

---

<sup>36</sup> Roberta Smith "Art of the Moment, Here to Stay," *New York Times*, February 15, 1998, Section 2, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, Interview by Kurt Wolgamott, <http://www.unl.edu/macaa/pdfs/InterviewSchjeldahl.pdf> (accessed August 26, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Mark Nash, "Art and Cinema: Some Critical Reflections," in *Documenta 11* exh. cat. Eds. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 129.

*With Doug Aitken: Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative, and The New Screen Media: Cinema/Art/Narrative* (edited by Martin Rieser and Andrea Zapp); journal articles such as “Should We Put an End to Projection?” by Dominique Païni (published in translation in *October* 110, fall 2004); conference panels such as “Screen Media/Media Screen,” (held at the 2004 College Art Association); and finally exhibitions such as the Projected Image at the Whitney attest, there is not a similarly sustained analysis of the disruptions and continuities the new temporal forms introduce to the museumgoing experience.

### **3.3 Critical Reception of Contemporary Video Installations**

One sign of film and video installation’s ascendancy is its inclusion into the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s permanent collection for the first time in 2002. The anxiety over film and video installation art’s status as the “new-new-new” (as London put it in her *Art Paper* interview) replacement of painting emerges in the choice: Bill Viola’s 2000 work, *Quintet of Remembrance*. Consisting of a medium shot of three women and two men against a darkened backdrop, the video shows a group that variously expresses through facial grimaces and body contortions emotions of compassion, shock, grief, anger, fear, and rapture over a sixteen-odd minute period. These expressions were filmed in extreme slow motion, without sound—the sixty-second performance was shot on high-speed thirty-five millimetre film, transferred to video and extended to approximately sixteen minutes. In the online summary of the work, the Metropolitan’s assistant curator of modern art Anne L. Strauss, writes the following:

Inspired by the artist's study of late medieval and early Renaissance paintings and their iconography, specifically the depiction of the Passion in Italian and Flemish painting of the era, the work belongs to a series of four, created in 2000 and 2001, in each of which a grouping of five people undergoes a mounting wave of emotional intensity.<sup>39</sup>

Strauss concludes with the following: "Running continuously on a loop, this powerful work makes provocative connections between the art of early Renaissance Europe and that of twenty-first-century America."

At two points in her summary, Strauss emphasizes the association between Viola's work and late medieval and Renaissance painting. Not only did the video work make obvious references to early examples of easel paintings through its subject matter, but its size and the way it was hung also bore striking similarities to painting. While it was exhibited as a rear projection on a large screen at the Metropolitan, when the larger series was exhibited by Viola's commercial representative, the James Cohan Gallery, it was shown on a series of flat plasma screens. Given this advance in video technology display, the series by Viola (and video more broadly) comes much closer to painting than earlier methods of video display, or the cathode-ray television monitor and the video projection. Furthermore, Viola drastically slowed down the work's "moving" component: the experience of viewing the work approached that of a still, rather than a moving image. It was only after a certain period of prolonged looking, or by turning away from the work, and after a minute or two, turning toward it again, that it became possible to perceive a shift in the emotional register of the on-

---

<sup>39</sup> Anne L. Strauss, "Bill Viola: *Quintet of Remembrances*," Metropolitan Museum of Art-The Collection: Recent Acquisitions, [http://www.metmuseum.org/Works\\_of\\_Art/recent\\_acquisitions/2001/co\\_rec\\_modern\\_2001.395a-i.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/recent_acquisitions/2001/co_rec_modern_2001.395a-i.asp) (accessed September 1, 2004).

screen actors. Finally, the absence of sound, another essential component of video and film, brought the work that much closer to its point of comparison, easel painting. In other words, given its resemblance to painting from the standpoint of historical antecedents (the quintet of actors and their dramatic resemblance to late medieval and early Renaissance subject matter) and form (the drastically slowed pace, the absence of sound)—all characteristics unique to Viola's work—it became “fit” for consumption by a conservative institution like the Metropolitan.

I began this section with this description of a single work to make the following point: while of course not all film and video work that has entered the museum resembles painting so closely, the anxiety produced by such work's recent dominance at art fairs, biennials, and contemporary galleries has been very high—so high that the representative work selected by the Metropolitan closely corresponds not only to a painting but also to a Renaissance easel painting. When Irit Batsry won the second annual Bucksbaum award at the 2002 Whitney Biennial, Smith reported that the announcement was greeted with a somewhat collective ““Oh no, not more film and video! The joke was [Smith continued] that the museum's survey would be renamed the Whitney Biennial Film Festival.”<sup>40</sup> Like Smith's and London's characterizations, much of the critical rhetoric that surrounds the explosion of video installation art describes (and unlike Smith and London, dismisses) it as part of a frenzy threatening to replace painting, for good or for ill. A representative sampling

---

<sup>40</sup> Roberta Smith, “Getting Caravaggio from Video, with Several Hearts of Darkness,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2004, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C07EFDB1E31F93AA35752C0A9629C8B63> (accessed June 12, 2006).

of both journalistic art criticism and scholarly writing brings this anxiety into focus, while also providing a good picture of the new aspects of time-space-viewer interactions introduced by video installations to the museum.

Schjeldahl also states:

[The art critic] Dave Hickey says painting isn't dead except as high art. It's now a high popular art, like jazz, which has a limited but sophisticated audience. The public face of basically institutions desperately filling up their spaces with exhibition agenda for which post-minimalist installations and videos are perfect. [sic] To get enough paintings to fill them, the insurance alone is going to bankrupt you. You get somebody to turn off the lights, set up a video projector and you're cool for the next two months.<sup>41</sup>

In a few flippant turns of phrase, Schjeldahl trivializes the dominance of “post-minimalist” video installations in museums, art fairs, and contemporary galleries as a consequence of both budgetary expediency and as a fast, cheap, and dirty way to be “cool” for two months. His characterization performs the neat rhetorical trick of simultaneously retaining for painting its ascendancy among the various contemporary art media (notwithstanding its shift in status from high to high-popular art) while undermining the “new” institutional dominance of video installations. Schjeldahl links “festivalism” with film and video installation in a *New Yorker* review of Documenta XI:

*Documenta 11* brings to robust maturity a style of exhibition—I call it festivalism—that has long been developing on the planetary circuit of more than fifty biennials and triennials, including the recent Whitney Biennial. Mixing entertainment and soft-core politics, festivalism makes an aesthetic of crowd control. It favors works that don't demand contemplation but invite, in passing, consumption of interesting—just not too interesting—spectacles....Enwezor flanks promenades of installations and innumerable

---

<sup>41</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, interview by Kurt Wolgamott, <http://www.unl.edu/macaa/pdfs/InterviewSchjeldahl.pdf> (accessed August 26, 2004).

photographs with darkened rooms, equipped for the prolonged enjoyment of videos and films. Given the show's anti-contemplative and anti-individualistic aims, painting and sculpture are scarce.<sup>42</sup>

Of particular interest here is his biting reference to "crowd control," which, for Schjeldahl, is made possible through the selection of "anti-contemplative and anti-individualistic" works, whose reception results in an audience conditioned to maintaining a predetermined traffic flow. In other words, for Schjeldahl, film and video installations create a viewing experience that maintains a bad-faith relation to both the spiritual and the political needs of its audience. The time that the visitor spends inside a film and video installation is not, we may deduce, of his or her own choosing. This idea about such installations places them in contrast to the more traditional media of sculpture and painting, which "allow" for spiritual and political insights produced by a lingering gaze. At the heart of Schjeldahl's claim lies a major contradiction: he seems to think that time-based works demand less time than paintings. For other reviewers the rewards offered by this additional layer of crowd control at Documenta XI were scant. Lev Manovich observes that the exhibition was so dominated by video and film installations that it felt like an "artist's cinema multiplex," stripped of the pleasures that comfortable seats, good sound quality and food offered in the mass-cultural version. Manovich notes further that the size of the video and film installations was determined not by the internal requirements of the individual work but rather by the prestige value of the artists such as Ulrike Ottinger and filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas. In other words, Documenta's exhibition plan

---

<sup>42</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, "The Global Salon: European Extravaganzas," *New Yorker*, July 1, 2002, 78, Issue 17, 94.



pandered to a trend instead of making a serious attempt to engage with the spatial demands of time-based work.<sup>43</sup>

In fact, Schjeldahl's criticism of a "new" form of traffic control reaches back to the older idea of exhibition practices described by Tony Bennett. Throughout the nineteenth century, both architecture and the placement of artifacts within the exhibition environment had been synchronized to spatialize what Bennett characterizes as "backtelling," a structure of both evolutionary narratives and detective stories designed to bring the viewer to a predetermined conclusion. As Bennett tells it, "the objects displayed and the order of their relations to one another allowed them to serve as props for a performance in which a progressively civilized relationship to the self might be formed and worked upon."<sup>44</sup> The museum, through this design, "enjoins the visitor to comply with a programme of organized walking [which I began this chapter by referencing] which transformed any tendency to gaze into a highly directed and sequentialized practice of looking."<sup>45</sup> The travel writer Barbara Ireland describes this experience in an account of her visit to the National Gallery in Washington to see the exhibition Cézanne in Provence: "Sometimes I merged with the flow of the crowd holding onto audio players and taking studied looks; other times I fought back against the current for one more view of a painting

---

<sup>43</sup> Lev Manovich, "Welcome to the Multiplex: Documenta 11, New Generation Film Festival (Lyon), LA Film Festival's New Technology Forum," <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0207/msg00003.html> (accessed August 30, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Bennett, 186.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 186.

too lovely not to be seen again...’’<sup>46</sup> This programmatic walking and looking continues to be “taught” to the museum visitor through tour guides, didactic texts, audio guides providing interpretive programming, as well as the choice of the objects displayed.

Instead of dismissing the similar assumption made by Schjeldahl and Manovich—that the new dominance of film and video installations produces an audience conditioned to maintaining a certain pace through the exhibition spaces at the expense of insight—I would argue that when additional temporal narratives are introduced through time-based media the audience is made aware of a preexisting imperative built into the exhibition spaces. A tension is created among the preexisting pace, or flow of traffic that is created by didactic texts, by other visitors, by museum guards, by the form of the exhibition spaces, and by the desire to see “what’s next,” as well as the average time a visitor sets aside from his or her daily routine to go to the museum; by the internal viewing demands of an object; and the new time demands created by the new narrative forms of film and video installation. The introduction of a new temporality does not in itself define film and video installation as ideologically or spiritually progressive. Nor does the awareness of two temporal narratives automatically create a form of Brechtian awareness. When the disjuncture between the two time forms is conceptually incorporated into the film or video installation, however, interesting results become possible.

---

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Ireland, “Cézanne’s Provence,” *The New York Times*, June 11, 2006, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/travel/11cezanne.html?scp=1&sq=%22barbara%20ireland%22%20cezanne&st=cse> (accessed June 15, 2006)

In a more contemplative response to the aesthetics of film and video installation, Boris Groys focuses on changes in two aspects of the gallery-going experience. The temporality of film and video installations, Groys writes, matches the temporality of everyday life, rather than the institutional time of the museum. Groys independently reiterates Schjeldahl's point when he argues that the temporal frame of film and video installations suggests to the viewers how much time they should spend in contemplation. Moreover, should we "interrupt our contemplation of some video or film work in order to return to it at a later point, we will inevitably be filled with that very same feeling of having missed something crucial and will no longer be sure what is really happening in the installation."<sup>47</sup> With the entry of film and video into exhibition spaces, in other words, we are returned to the experiences of real life, "that familiar place...where one is forever haunted by the feeling of being in the wrong place at the wrong time."<sup>48</sup> Film and video installations, for Groys, create an anxiety in the viewer for which there is no adequate and satisfactory solution: "Whatever the individual's decision, to stay put or to keep moving, his choice will always amount to a poor compromise."<sup>49</sup>

Groys' second point concerns illumination—film and video exhibits are not lit by the museum but rather emit their own source of light or darkness: "Video and film installations have now introduced deepest night or dusk into the museum."<sup>50</sup> The artist, Groys points out, now controls the light by which we see the work. Curators

---

<sup>47</sup> Boris Groys, "On the Aesthetics of Video Installations," in *Stan Douglas: Le Détroit* (exh. cat.) Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 2001.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

who work with film and video installation take this further by arguing that while the installation of video and film in the gallery introduces the black box into the white cube, it also frees the spectator from what they regard as the strictures of traditional cinema (in contrast to Manovich's complaint about the discomfort of film and video installation seating). Lynne Cooke, in an essay on Marijke van Warmerdam, stresses the absence of fixed seating as a plus because it required spectators to "determine their own vantage points."<sup>51</sup> This process, for Cooke, produces a consciousness within the viewers of their own bodies that prevents them from becoming "totally immersed, incarnate viewers" who passively experience popular cinema while "cocooned in a darkened chamber."<sup>52</sup> Chrissie Iles used a similar analogy when she writes: "Cinema becomes a cocoon, inside which a crowd of relaxed idle bodies is fixed, hypnotized by simulations of reality projected onto a single screen. This model is broken apart by the folding of the dark space of cinema into the [modernist] white cube of the gallery."<sup>53</sup>

The metaphor of a black box nesting inside a white cube is a potent one. For Groys it spells the end of the white cube, and for Cooke and Iles it describes the end of a certain kind of cinematic experience commonly associated with Hollywood narrative film. However, as Mark Nash points out, "much writing on video and film in the gallery can too easily gloss 'sitting in a cinema' with 'passivity,' or 'mobility'

---

<sup>51</sup> I engage fully with this point in the final chapter.

<sup>52</sup> Lynne Cooke, "B(e)aring Meaning," in *Marijke van Warmerdam: Single, Double Crossing*, exh. cat. (Eindhoven, Van Abbemuseum, 1997), 8.

<sup>53</sup> Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art, 1964-1977*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), 34.

with ‘freedom’....”<sup>54</sup> As Nash goes on to elaborate, to go to the movies in Puerto Rico, Lagos, or Mumbai is to encounter a very different, active, call-and-response approach to spectatorship. Umberto Eco describes this form of spectatorship at length in his account of the Italian viewing habits of popular film, where the cinemagoer is allowed to enter a theater at any point and stay on to see the film again from the moment where one has entered the on-screen narrative:

I think this is a good custom, because I hold that film is much like life in a certain respect: I entered into this life with my parents already born and Homer’s *Odyssey* already written, and then I tried to work out the story going backward...until I more or less understood what had happened in the world before I arrived.<sup>55</sup>

Here, Eco does not characterize the audience experience of a filmic narrative as an event with a beginning, a middle, and an end that provides a neat, predetermined conclusion over which the audience has no control. Rather, the narrative is something that can be viewed in part or whole, from the beginning, middle, or end. The cinemagoer works out for herself or himself (or does not, as the case may be) the story that precedes his or her entry and can repeatedly watch elements of the film that were of particular interest. Eco describes this in his recollection of a moment where half the audience left after a particularly dramatic scene in the middle of a Hollywood narrative film, *Black Day at Black Rock*. The protagonist, played by Spencer Tracy, had finally lashed out against a systemic injustice:

They were spectators who had come in at the start of the *delectation morose* and had stayed on to enjoy the preparatory phases of the moment of liberation all over again. From this you can see that...time functions not only to keep the

---

<sup>54</sup> Nash, 131.

<sup>55</sup> Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 65.

attention of the naïve first-level spectator, but also to stimulate the aesthetic enjoyment of the second-level spectator.<sup>56</sup>

For Eco, this allows the film audience to potentially retrace events that have already occurred, arriving at a different experience of the same material. Antonio Pasolini, an editor of the online journal *Kamera*, recalls childhood memories in Brazil of entering the theater midway through a feature film and staying on for the next screening: “Of course we were always late and unwittingly constantly re-edited films and watched them in a loop.”<sup>57</sup>

Eco’s description of difference experienced through repetition and Pasolini’s of an audience-centered editing process correspond perfectly with the by-now-ubiquitous temporal structure that came to define film and video installation in the 1990s: the loop. As Tim Griffin, then an art critic for *Time Out New York*, remarks “The high count of artists working with loops makes a totally comprehensive survey of the trend nearly impossible.”<sup>58</sup> In the light of this ubiquity, my final summary of the decidedly ambivalent reception of the newly dominant form of film and video installation will be David Beech’s essay, “Video after Diderot.” Written in 1999, Beech predicted that in the—for him, hopefully not too distant—future, the video loop would be retroactively interpreted as the “defining embarrassment” of the 1990s, as a phenomenon that serves to both define and dismiss a decade, just as fashion trends like shoulder pads, fanny packs, and big hair have come to define the 1980s.

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>57</sup> Antonio Pasolini, “Looping: from A to B and Back. Again and Again and Again....,” <http://www.kamera.co.uk/features/looping.php> (accessed May 31, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Tim Griffin “Circular Logic: P.S. 1 throws viewers for a ‘Loop,’” *Time Out New York*, January 17–24, 2002, 55.

Beech writes, “It is easy to blame the preponderance of the video loop on the modes of attention developed in the galleries for the convenience of painting and sculpture.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, for Beech, the loop as a temporal form does *not* emerge as a function of the museum, art gallery, or art survey it is presented in. Rather, he links the prevalence of the loop in video installations in part on the decision from within performance art in the 1960s and 1970s to pursue temporal realism to the detriment of the abstraction necessary for narrative. Beech argues that this history accounts for the video loop’s failure, hence its assumed fate as an embarrassing trend.

As these responses indicate, since the mid- to late-1990s, film and video installations have come to dominate art fairs and biennials in particular, and contemporary art venues in general. As a consequence of this level of presence, a “new” model of institutional time has insinuated itself into exhibition spaces. An institutional space with a specific temporal imperative and a new temporal form, the loop, meshes with advances in technology to potentially create a new form of experience. The film or video loop is a result of editing that involves the telling and retelling of a narrative. Given its protean nature, the loop takes many forms, and in the following and final section, I review some of the possibilities produced by its introduction into the gallery space. The following examples of film and video installations will elaborate on the mutable nature of the loop as a temporal form, and its relation to the institutional time of the museum.

---

<sup>59</sup> David Beech, “Video after Diderot,” *Art Monthly*, no. 225 (April 1999): 8.

### 3.4 New Institutional Time: The Loop

As Beech and Griffin observed, loops emerged in the 1990s as the dominant temporal form of film and video installations in the gallery and museum. References to the loop in descriptions of film and video installation art first appear in catalog essays and art magazines between 1991 and 1993.<sup>60</sup> Its proliferation and then ubiquity coincides, as Beech notes, with the rise into institutional dominance of film and video installation. The loop would appear to be the ideal temporal form for the museum, in that it allows viewers to edit and control their viewing experience through their comings and goings, like Eco's Italian cinema audience. But whereas the temporal experience of looking at painting or other still media produces the illusion that the time needed to view the work is produced by the audience, as Groys points out, film and video installations introduce the experience of the insufficiency of everyday time into the museum.

#### 3.4.1 Stan Douglas: *Win, Place, or Show* (1997)

As a temporal form, the loop establishes new relations among past, present, and future and between space and time. There are manifold possibilities for this: it could take the form of a figure eight, a succession of rings, a cat's cradle, or a skipping rope. Loops do not establish the "perfect" cycle assumed in, say, a circular movement, but rather establish a slightly distorted repetition that maintains the idea of either an imperfectly imagined future or a persistently misremembered past. An

---

<sup>60</sup> Early references can be found in David Joselit "Projected Identities," *Art in America*, 79, no. 11 (Nov. 1991): 116–123, and Jean-Charles Masséra, "Pierrick Sorin: arrêt sur le ratage" [Pierreck Sorin: Focus on Failure] *Art Press* (France), no. 185 (Nov. 1993): 46–47.



advance is made into the future or the past, followed by a withdrawal and then another advance that is slightly different from the first. A brilliant example from film and video installation that formally plays with this oscillation between past, present, and future is Stan Douglas' *Win, Place, or Show* (1997). Exhibited as two images projected side by side, the on-screen narrative, or set piece, between two characters is presented simultaneously from two viewpoints. The setting is a planned but never constructed dormitory building on Hastings Street in Vancouver, Canada. The set piece's point of departure is the fundamental transformation of civic space that occurred in North America during the postwar era, initiated at the institutional level under the rubric of urban renewal. The characters in the story, two dockworkers named Donny and Bob, share a tenth-floor, one bedroom apartment. They are trapped together inside the apartment on a rainy day. They touch on a series of topics in their forced conversation: successively the weather, news items from the day's paper, occult mysteries, conspiracy theories, and games of chance triggered by the betting odds for the day's horse races that are printed in the newspaper. Close to the end, an argument flares up over the paper's racing form. It escalates briefly into a physical confrontation that the older roommate, Bob, wins.

Filmed using twelve separate camera angles, the various takes of the six-minute narrative were edited together in real time by a computer during the exhibition, generating an almost endless series of subtle variations in dialogue, shot angle, and resolution of the same story. Douglas wrote that the loop would only theoretically repeat for a given viewer after "six minutes of more than 20,000 hours

[or approximately 200,000 variations] are presented.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, viewers who remain in front of the work for more than one narrative cycle would not feel as if they were watching a significantly different narrative: nevertheless while the cycle is not disrupted, it does not repeat. The work is “less concerned with the narration of the event than with the space of its unfolding,” Douglas argued. On the one hand, the events appear to repeat themselves eternally. Donny will forever rub Bob the wrong way with his pontifications regarding a game involving horse racing; Bob will always win the fight; the work will always close with a variation of the laconic remark, “If I wasn’t so tired I’d slug you again”; and Donny will forever reply with a version of, “I know it.” On the other hand, nothing repeats: the shot angles, the perspective on the apartment, the dialogue and point of view always change, ever so slightly. In this way, the work reproduces the experience of memory, in which even the most obsessive return to an event that took place in the past fails to perfectly repeat the occurrence: “[L]ike the obsessive remembrance and reconsideration of a traumatic incident in one’s life that cannot be resolved because its true cause was elsewhere, and remains unavailable to the space of memory.”<sup>62</sup> Was the professor wearing a purple or a mauve sweater? Did the cat come into the room from the partially opened French doors leading onto a Juliet balcony, or from the bedroom cupboard? Did the mother tell the son, “I love you too?” or “I love U2?” When repeatedly imagining a future event, the details constantly shift: When my son is born, it will be a normal

---

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Gordon Lebrecht, “Stan Douglas: Living the Drive” *Parachute* 103 (July–September, 2001), 28.

<sup>62</sup> Dia Center for the Arts press release November 2, 1999 “*Double Vision* Installation at Dia Center for the Arts February 11, 1999–June 13, 1999.” <http://www.diachelsea.org/dia/press/douglasgordon.html> (accessed June 18, 2006)

delivery following twenty-three hours of labor. It will be an emergency C-section. My newborn son will lie on my chest for the first forty-five minutes of his life. My newborn son will be taken away from me immediately because I will have a fever.

### **3.4.2 Marijke van Warmerdam: *Sprong* (1994)**

By destabilizing both the present and the past, the loop insists on a present tense, which, while not necessarily *refusing* either the future or the past, nevertheless alters the present's relation to both. Douglas embeds this refusal in the technological structure of *Win, Place, or Show*. When a loop mechanically reproduces itself, however, the audience's experience of what preceded and what will follow alters the quality of the narrative. Like Eco's Italian film audience, the repetition of the cycle brings to the viewer advance knowledge of the narrative, thus situating the viewer between an imperfect recollection of what just occurred and a constantly shifting anticipation of what is about to take place. Given this structure, the viewer of the loop is presented with new "institutional" choices inherent in the unfolding of a (potentially) perpetual temporality: either to view the unresolvedness as an end in itself or to wait for the cathartic moment to return again and again. This fundamentally shifts the audience's relation to both the narrative and the rest of the museum experience and makes even the weakest work in the genre persuasive, as Griffin comments, thanks to its "deep, dreamlike uncanny pulse."<sup>63</sup> Thus the loop becomes a temporal form whose length may be chosen by the viewer, produce catharsis, evoke a dreamlike state, mimic everyday life, or all of the above.

---

<sup>63</sup> Griffin, "Circular Logic," 55.

A simple and elegant example of this is the work of the Dutch artist Marijke van Warmerdam. Van Warmerdam's works are not installations, in that they "do not enclose or engage physical space."<sup>64</sup> Nor, as Iles contends, are they purely "film," even though van Warmerdam shoots her work on celluloid. Her works use the strategies of looping to refuse the progression of a filmic narrative and to draw attention to their own constructions, thus presenting the idea of a narrative without actually serving one up. While her body of work depends on the loop as a temporal form, it can in turn be broken down into several subcategories. Some are looped for the sake of gallery presentation rather than using the loop as an integral conceptual device. One group endlessly repeats short, single, unedited shots, filmed in real time, such as *Handstand* (*Handstand*, 1992), *Rijst* (*Rice*, 1995), *Douche* (*Shower*, 1995), and *Blondine* (*Blondie*, 1995), while others such as *Sprong* (*Jump*, 1994), *Vliegtuigen* (*Airplane*, 1994), and *Skytypers* (*Skywriters*, 1997) are more obviously edited. As Iles notes, "In *Handstand*, the loop is so fluid that it is hard to discern how many handstands the young girl makes before the sequence is repeated." Whereas in "*Sprong*, by contrast, the breaks between the end of one short sequence and the beginning of another are made clear through sharp edits and staccato sound. A single shot of a man performing a somersault is continuously repeated in both forward and reverse motion, drawing attention to the artificiality of the sequence."<sup>65</sup> In the temporal structure of these works, tracing the beginning and the end of the narrative

---

<sup>64</sup> Chrissie Iles, "The Magic of the Unreal," *Marijke van Warmerdam*, exh. cat. (Köln: Oktagon Verlag, 2000)

<sup>65</sup> Iles, "The Magic of the Unreal."

structure, or its past and future, becomes almost impossible. Iles writes, “We stare at Van Warmerdam’s film loops not purely for the pleasure of experiencing a short sequence over and over again, but to find out whether what we are seeing is the same as what we have just seen. We cannot always be sure that this is the case.”<sup>66</sup>

Given that the temporal form of the loop alters our relation to the past, present, and future, it also disrupts the museum’s spatialized narrative, with its preconceived endpoint. Ellen Seiferman writes in her introduction to a catalog on van Warmerdam that the “permanent repetition of the film loop expands time into infinity, redeeming the action from its logical conclusion....”<sup>67</sup> In all these works causal loops are upended, in that events occur and effects come before *and after* their causes. In Van Warmerdam’s *Sprong*, for example, the commonplace assumptions of the physical mechanics required for a jump are potentially destabilized: it becomes momentarily possible to believe that a jump could begin in mid-air, or move in the opposite direction. As Joseph Berkowitz observes, this redeems causal loops from tautological formulations such as, “causes precede their effects,” hence the impossibility of backwards causation. This reversal contradicts the presuppositions built into linear time, wherein the causal dimension of space/time is time, and time is linearcauses determine the possibilities of their effects.<sup>68</sup> The loop interrupts the inevitable quality of linear narrative by introducing forms of nonlinear time into the museum. Consequently, the visitor is temporarily lifted out of the movement within

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ellen Seiferman, “Preface,” *Marijke van Warmerdam*, exh. cat. (Köln: Oktagon Verlag, 2000)

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Berkowitz, “On Chance in Causal Loops,” *Mind* 110, no. 437 (January 2001): 4.

and between galleries, and while he or she is not removed completely from the museum's narrative progression, this narrative is disrupted through the range of responses produced in the viewer by a competing temporal system.

### **3.4.3 Douglas Gordon: *Through a Looking Glass* (1999)**

While van Warmerdam's work neither takes into consideration the space in which it is installed nor draws on Hollywood narrative, her close, exhaustive study of this time form over an impressive body of work makes clear some of the possibilities opened up by the loop for both narrative and exhibition spaces.<sup>69</sup> Beech sees the loop's greatest failing as its inability to provide a narrative. But when segments of a Hollywood narrative are excised and re-represented in a space other than the movie theater, an entirely new experience is produced. Douglas Gordon's video installation *Through a Looking Glass* (1999) is an excellent example. It features the scene from Martin Scorsese's 1976 film *Taxi Driver*, in which the protagonist, Travis Bickle (played by Robert De Niro), challenges his mirrored reflection with the now-iconic provocation, "You talkin' to me?" In Gordon's reworking, the scene is projected onto two screens placed on opposite walls of a gallery space. The original scene from the movie, filmed as a reflection in the mirror, is shown on one screen. The other screen in Gordon's installation reverses the image, flipped horizontally left to right. The two facing mirror images (endlessly) repeat the dialogue fragment, firing Bickle's provocation across the gallery's space and through its viewer, who becomes

---

<sup>69</sup> For more on narrative space see Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Questions of Cinema (Theories of Representation and Difference)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 19–75.

trapped in the crossfire, like a reluctant third party drawn into enabling an emotionally ever-more corrosive, yet indissoluble relationship. Beginning in sync, the twinned provocations progressively fall out of joint, in this way performing the the loss of control and mental breakdown that both forms the narrative arc of Scorsese's movie and is distilled in this quintessential scene. In its almost dizzying play of dualities, *Through a Looking Glass* is also typical of Gordon's body of work, in the way that it articulates a series of dialectical inversions, doublings, and repetitions without resolution.

When a previously filmed or videotaped act is looped, the action is paradoxically transformed through unending repetition. By lifting a segment from a longer narrative, or by repetitively editing together an originally conceived work of film and video, the loop becomes, first, an "extended fragment." Second, it becomes distinguished from repetition in that it is truly infinite and seamless: forward and backward motion eliminates the beginning and end of the action. Through both looping and doubling, the original intention behind the action—de Niro's menacing gesture toward the mirror—becomes altered in Gordon's work. The originating interrogatory, "You talkin' to me?" does not simply dissipate through repetition. Rather, the meaning of the gesture is transformed into a specific sensation chosen by Gordon through his selection from the ongoing narrative of a specific action and the manner in which he loops it. Gordon's choice of subject and fragment contributes to the effect the loop has on the viewer's interpretation. The loop produced by doubling

the scene, and then letting the repetition fall out of sync, transforms the sample from its original context into a new work.

Gordon's *Through a Looking Glass* embeds the museum visitor in a spiraling series of exchanges that are hurled across the exhibition space between the two de Niro's. This placement of the visitor inside the work would seem to establish a continuum between Gordon and artists such as Keith Sonnier, whose work I address above in this chapter. But when the installation (and contemporary film and video installation more broadly) is considered in relation to postminimalist concerns with the phenomenological interrelation between the viewer, the space, and the work, a difference is perceived between Sonnier's and Gordon's generation, which has to do with the virtual and the phenomenological. George Baker elaborated this in a roundtable discussion about the projected image in contemporary art (published in *October* in 2003). Describing Gordon's work as exemplifying the problems intrinsic to contemporary film and video installation, Baker notes that with the "cacophonous disassociation" arrived at through the desynchronized looped appropriations, the work "derealized the exhibition space and seemed in a parallel manner to utterly negate the viewer by recourse to a pathological space of the virtual.... This is opposed to the hyperconsciousness of the phenomenological typical of the tradition of the '60s and '70s."<sup>70</sup> Hal Foster, a roundtable participant, describes a current disregard for the apparatus—notably, the embodiment of the viewer and the parameters of space that result in a "rampant virtualism"—which, he claims, goes beyond disembodiment and

---

<sup>70</sup> George Baker, in George Baker et al., "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 77.



conditions the viewer to a state of postsubjectivity, an experience originally conceived of by media conglomerates.<sup>71</sup> Whereas the subject of the *October* roundtable is the projected image, I am addressing a form of temporality that is also taken up in performance, sculpture, as well as video installation.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, for Baker the deciding mechanism that makes “virtual space” possible in *Through a Looking Glass* is the rapidly degrading loop. Because of the particular way that Gordon chose to construct his loop, the net result, for the roundtable discussants, is that the museum space and, by extension, the viewer are shut out of, or obliterated from, a pathologically dissonant series of exchanges. I would argue, on the contrary, that an adversarial relationship is established between the installation and the intrinsic temporal demands of the institution. A visitor strays into the work, whose engagement takes place exclusively between the two versions of the protagonist, producing a form of insanity by obliterating the flesh-and-blood visitor. Precisely *because* the visitor is both trapped in and shut out of any meaningful participation in the virtual exchange between the two versions of Bickle, a “new” pathology is created through the ultimately fruitless attempt at viewer-work interaction when the pathology negates the museum experience. The visitor has entered the room, experienced the virtual exchange, and he or she will leave the work and “re-enter” the museum.

---

<sup>71</sup> Hal Foster, in George Baker et al., “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art,” *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 75.

<sup>72</sup> See the catalog accompanying the exhibition *Loop* at PS1 from December 9, 2001, through January 27, 2002, for examples. Artists in the exhibition included Francis Alÿs, Ceal Floyer, Rodney Graham, Christoph Keller, Aernout Mik, Susan Philipsz, Santiago Sierra, and Yutaka Sone.

#### **3.4.4 Doug Aitken: *Electric Earth* (1999)**

Contemporaries of Gordon, such as Doug Aitken and Pierre Huyghe, directly address the exhibition space by playing with this distinction between the artist's virtually conceived environment and the phenomenological relation the visitor maintains with his or her museum experience. Huyghe's and Aitken's manipulations of the imperfectly enmeshed nature of the exhibition space's intrinsic temporal structure with that of its institutional context offer examples of the possibilities open to artists working with film and video installation. Doug Aitken does so with large-scale film and video installations such as *Electric Earth* that expand on the possibilities of the loop's complexity in the museum; Huyghe by staging his work, such as *Streamside Day Follies*, in and outside the museum. Less directly grounded in the prehistory of minimalism, postminimalism, land art and conceptual art, as I show in the previous chapter, Aitken's installations in general, and *Electric Earth* in particular (awarded the Premio Internazionale at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999), consist of highly structured plans internal to the museum, which are designed to accommodate his complex temporal structures. Shown at the 2000 Whitney Biennial, *Electric Earth* both incorporated the traffic flow of the biennial and created temporal structures that were separate and discrete from it: its spatial and temporal complexity requires a lengthy description.

The installation had a clearly defined entry and exit point. Consisting of three rooms, the central room was in turn divided by a scrim, with an opening located in the middle for the audience to pass through. Signage outside Aitken's installation

directed the audience to the entryway: as a result, the audience traffic flowed from rooms 1 through 4 (notwithstanding, fully one third of the traffic moved in the direction “not recommended”). Eight laser-disc videos were projected onto eight screens spaced out across the installation.<sup>73</sup> Four narrative sequences were projected. The first room showed a single-channel loop whose running time was approximately eighty seconds. In the second room, two multichannel loops were shown. The first, projected across three screens and shown in the first half of the second room had a running time of approximately three minutes and twenty seconds. The second, also consisting of three screens and shown in the second half of the second room, had a running time of approximately four minutes. The last loop projection, shown in the third room, was, like the first, a single-channel video and had a running time of approximately forty-five to fifty seconds.

The video installation created a *mise en abyme* whose center was the shifting tide of visitors that ebbed and flowed through the rooms. Within the *mise en abyme*, Daniel Birnbaum writes, a multitemporal world emerged that “harboured not one flow of events but a labyrinth of diverging paths, each with its own pace and temporality.”<sup>74</sup> With his loops, Aitken’s installations refuse the authority of a linear narrative driven by cause and effect, freeing the installation’s visitor to see a before and after simultaneous to the present. The installation’s looped progression was broken into several zones that the viewer could move through. In doing so, each

---

<sup>73</sup> Filmed first onto thirty-five millimeter film, the footage was then transferred onto digital video.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, “That’s the Only Now I Get: Space, Time and Experience in the Work of Doug Aitken,” in *Doug Aitken*, Daniel Birnbaum, Amanda Sharp and Jorg Heiser (New York: Phaidon Press, 2001), 51.

sequence drew attention to its own construction, whose form allowed for a range of variations that produced, as Birnbaum puts it, “intricate labyrinths of folded space time.”<sup>75</sup> By breaking linear plot into simultaneous options, Aitkens created a temporal and spatial counterpoint to the viewer’s movements. This description evokes the interchanges taking place between the multiple screens. At moments, the shots on three screens shifted together. At others, one screen held a shot for a longer time, while the action moved from point to point across the other two screens. At all times, the choreography between the screens carried the museum visitor along inside a narrative with manifold strands, or pathways. These pathways changed not only as a consequence of the action that took place between the screens in a given room but also because of interchanges created between the four distinct narratives that were projected across the single or multiple screens in each room. Unlike van Warmerdam’s loops, the progression of *Electric Earth*’s narrative strands is not short or simple enough to meld into a loop with uncertain beginnings and endings. Rather, the uncertainties of Aitken’s loops are achieved by combining narratives of different time lengths.

Filmed at the Los Angeles International Airport, *Electric Earth* follows the hip-hop dancer Ali Johnson’s progress as he moves through and “with” a depopulated, heavily industrialized landscape. His free-form dance acts as a call and response to the industrial sounds, images, and movements that fill the protagonist’s and the audience’s senses. In the first room of the installation, the action begins with

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 51.

a still shot of Johnson lying on a partially made bed, watching television. The space is anonymous, presumably a hotel or motel room. The camera cuts to progressively tighter shots of the protagonist, and eventually his eye fills the screen. It then cuts away to a tight shot of his hand resting on the bed, holding the television's remote control. Over shots 1 through 4, a man's voice speaks: "A lot of times I dance so fast that I become what's around me. It's like food for me, I like absorb that energy, absorb that information. It's like I eat it. It's the only now I get." In the ensuing silence, the camera cuts to a shot split in two: the left half shows a mirror reflection of the man lying in bed, the right half a television screen. There is no signal, and electric snow fills the screen as the voice-over repeats the phrase, "It's the only now I get," followed by silence. An electronic hum begins and progressively increases over the next shots. The camera cuts back to the television screen filled with electric snow, and then to a closer shot of the man falling asleep in front of the television. Waking from his "electric sleep," the protagonist rises from his bed, puts on a jacket, and leaves the room. The door swings shut, and the screen in Room 1 fades to black, ending the loop.

Rooms 2a and 2b contained the most sophisticated interchange of loops, continuing the narrative set up by the prelude in Room 1. While each subchamber of the central room contains a distinct narrative, the action on the two sets of three screens is inevitably interrelated, thanks to the scrim that only partially intercepted the flow of sound and images. Essential to the experience is the sound, composed by the electronic producers Uziq and Caustic Window, and the location of the visitor. In

Room 2a, the action “begins” across multiple screens, which show a freeze-frame of Johnson: on screen 2 and 3 the freeze-frame started with a tight shot framing his right shoulder—releasing the freeze-frame, he steps out of the frame, stage left. On screen 4, the freeze-frame of an out-of-focus image of Johnson’s head “breaks” into movement at the same time as the other screens. The succeeding shots at times alternately doubled or trebled the action across two or three screens or else showed variations of the same sequence. In one of the earlier sequences in room 2a, a shot of an airplane taking off is repeated across screens 2 and 3. On screen 4, out-of-focus fingers snap and flicker frenetically. Over these shots, atmospheric traffic sounds escalate in volume, gradually fading into a succession of notes that reach a crescendo and that are cut off when Johnson falls into a push-up. Screens 2 and 3 then cut to a tracking shot of Johnson walking along a chain-link fence, silhouetted against the sun sitting low on the horizon. Overhead, to his right, an airplane descends, preparing to land. Screen 4 shows a mirror reversal of screens 2 and 3. Until screen 3 cut away to a new sequence, it matched up perfectly with 4 so that the two images formed a right-angle, animated Rorschach blot. Over the shots the phrase “that’s the only now I get” is repeated and layered over the atmospheric sound of traffic in the distance.

The subsequent scene begins with screen 3 cutting away earlier than screens 2 and 4 to a variation of a close-up of a fragment of flapping, plasticized cloth caught on the barbed wire running atop the chain-link fence, which encloses the airport runways. The sound of the wind and of the plasticized fabric flapping in the breeze begins at the moment that screen 3 cuts away to the fabric: layered over the wind is

the sound of bells and an ascending and descending series of notes. Most of this scene is taken up with variations of close-ups of Johnson's hands silhouetted against the sky. Sometimes only one out-of-focus finger is visible; at other times his entire hand appears in the foreground, while airplanes take off and land in the twilight. At the Whitney, some of the audience members mimed the on-screen hand's movement by projecting their own shadow puppets onto the projection.

The remainder of the narrative follows Johnson through a series of interactions with his environment, including an elaborately painted hallway, a streetscape populated by shuttered pawnshops and cut-rate department stores, empty car washes, Laundromats and parking lots; these interactions culminate in a penultimate scene composed of a tightly edited sequence between Johnson and the movement created by a dollar bill jerkily sliding in and out of a broken vending machine. The last sequence in room 2b and the climax of the two multiscreen loops begins with a fade into a long shot of the city at night, spread out below the camera like a field of lights partially filling the screen. Accompanying the new sequence is a very abrupt shift into drums and bass from what had been an atmospheric soundscape. A very rhythmic, intense, aural moment, at the Whitney it caught the audience members up in the excitement. Overlaying the drums and bass is the sound of an acceleration, like a jet plane taking off. While three screens cut between a profile shot of Johnson breathing very heavily, either out of heavy physical exertion or a very strong emotion and the landscape of light, the center screen, or screen 6 stayed on Johnson. The light seems to break into movement and accelerate across the screen,

after which follows a series of images of lights speeding by that replace each other in lightning-quick succession. The trails of light speed by like a roller-coaster, merging into a whirligig of movement. At the climax of this aural and visual acceleration it is abruptly cut off. After holding onto a black screen for a period of time, screens 5 and 7 fade into a shot of Johnson that is already up on screen 6. The image projected on all three screens then freezes, ending the loop.

After the climactic sound and the fury of rooms 2a and 2b, the simplicity of the last room provides a denouement to the work. One projection fills the wall adjacent to the exit. The loop is the shortest, consisting of one long still shot of Johnson walking away from the camera, through a tunnel empty of traffic.

For Birnbaum, the temporal variations produced by Aitken's installations in general and *Electric Earth* in particular succeed in upsetting the conventional Western conception of time, a tradition marked by a series of "now points" strung along a line, an image that recurs from Aristotle's *Physics* to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of time consciousness. Instead, Birnbaum writes, Aitken's multichannel, multiroom installations succeed in establishing temporal forms described by Gilles Deleuze in his study *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. For Deleuze, time takes the form of "an intricate structure of bifurcating and divergent series," or in the words of Jorge Luis Borges, a "garden of forking paths."<sup>76</sup> In sharing a title with this phrase, Borges refers to a Chinese architect and philosopher, Ts'ui Pên, who does not believe in absolute, uniform time:

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 51.



He believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of diverging, convergent and parallel times. This network of times that approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces all possibilities of time. We do not exist in the majorities of these times. In some you exist, and not I; in others I, and not you; in others, both of us.<sup>77</sup>

Birnbaum's citation of Deleuze and Borges begins to establish a conceptual framework for the experience that Aitken's work brings to the museum. The vocabulary developed to describe the canon as a musical form provides a clear descriptive model of the structure that emerge out of film and video installations like Aitken's. Canons consist of a melodic line that is played both consecutive simultaneously. A melody can be introduced by one instrument, followed after a number of beats by a second instrument, either on the same or a higher or lower pitch. A simple and familiar example is the song "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." More complex methods of composing the call and response between melodic lines can include augmentation and diminution (lengthening or shortening the notes of the answering instrument), inversion (turning the subject upside down by making each rising interval a falling one and vice versa), retrogression (giving the subject notes in reverse order), or repeating the melody pitches of the subject but changing its meter and note duration. While more loosely structured than a canon, the form of *Electric Earth* strongly resembles this description, with the mirroring and inversion of shots, the variation of on-screen footage across multiple screens, and the repetition, interaction, and overlay of the multiple narrative strands. Unlike the canon or the

---

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Birnbaum, 51.

round, however, and like Stan Douglas' *Win, Place, or Show*, each repetition of *Electric Earth*'s looping narrative varies endlessly.

A key difference between film and video installation and music is the place of the audience. Audience members who attend a live performance of an orchestra or who listen to the same performance at home are not inside the performance, in that they are not walking around between the performers, picking or choosing which instrument they would like to concentrate on.<sup>78</sup> Johnson's journey through the postindustrial landscape makes him Aitken's idealized stand-in for the audience. Like Johnson, the museum visitor wanders from point to point within Aitken's landscape and, from each point, experiences the work from a new perspective. The confluence of the wandering audience member and the multitudinal variations of the loop's strands succeed in producing a cat's cradle of "now" points from which the work is continuously produced from and by the visitor. The museum's visitor who moves from one room to the next in *Electric Earth* becomes, as Birnbaum writes, "part of the scenario, not through empathy, but through the physical experience of the work. It's his/her bodily conduct and kinaesthetic experience that determines the rhythms and structure of the work."<sup>79</sup> To return to Birnbaum's rehearsal of the various philosophies of time, Edmond Husserl's comet provides a useful image to

---

<sup>78</sup> A transcendent example of an installation that achieves this experience is Janet Cardiff's *Forty Part Motet* (2001), a reworking of *Spem in Alium* by Thomas Tallis, a sixteenth-century English composer. A composition for forty voices, *Spem in Alium* was written on the occasion of the fortieth birthday of Queen Elizabeth I. In the installation, forty separately recorded choir singers were played back through forty speakers positioned around the room. The visitor could listen to each of the voices in turn or to all of them together from the middle of the room. With this work, Cardiff wanted to make it possible to "climb inside the music."

<sup>79</sup> Birnbaum, 97.

conceptualize the “now” experience produced by the interaction between Aitken’s work and the audience: “The line represents the succession of now-points, but the *now* itself is constantly new.” Or, to return to the voice-over that begins *Electric Earth*, “that’s the only now I get.” The journey through Aitken’s installation is “never predictable and never the same,” and it requires both the museum’s intrinsic narrative trajectory and the loop’s tautological failure.

### **3.4.5 Pierre Huyghe: *Streamside Day Follies* (2004)**

Aitken succeeded in making the phenomenological and the virtual come together to produce a new experience in the museum. Nevertheless, as my analogy of the *mise en abyme* suggests, *Electric Earth* truly became a black hole, not the black box mentioned previously. When entering *Electric Earth*, the museum visitor entered a new space-time configuration but then returned back to the larger museum, which had its temporal imperative intact. My final example, Pierre Huyghe’s *Streamside Day Follies*, brings together some of the defining characteristics of the loop that I have outlined here: the relocation of the audience, the refusal of tautology, and most important, the disruption of the museum’s narrative. With *Streamside Day Follies*, Huyghe undermines the museum’s imperialist mandate to absorb and separate a carefully edited version of the world by redefining it through a new set of temporal relations. Like Enwezor, he does so first by staging critical components of his work outside the museum, and second by carrying out a radical reassessment of the temporal nature of the work of art.

In an interview with George Baker, Huyghe stresses that *Streamside Day Follies* played with exhibition conventions and protocols. Huyghe wanted it to “register the manner in which there had been a shift in terms of these issues between the ‘Dia’ generation,” or Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Walter de Maria, Michael Heizer, and his own generation of artists. “The earlier artists were mostly concerned with space and sculptural resolutions, whereas temporal issues seem more important today.”<sup>80</sup> For Huyghe, a temporal consideration of display protocols takes shape as a study of the nature of an *event* and its translation into the exhibition space. Huyghe distinguishes the event from a performance, in that a performance is, by definition, unique. By contrast, he wanted to incorporate repeatability, or, as he put it, replay, into his work:

The replay really is the most important thing. It is not the event anymore that is important, it is the replay. If artists in the 1960s and ‘70s used to deal with this idea of event, performance, action—Kaprow for instance—the representation of the event was not incorporated into the conception of the project.<sup>81</sup>

An annually observed holiday like Christmas is an event that repeats every year. But performances such as the happenings—or unique events that are shaped by the actions of the audience participating in any given performance—that are exemplified by Allan Kaprow were intended to be neither repeated nor reproduced. Indeed, the defining characteristic of the happening is its ephemeral quality.

---

<sup>80</sup> Pierre Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” interview by George Baker, *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 82.

<sup>81</sup> Huyghe, 83.

*Streamside Day Follies'* production and reproduction took place over several stages; at each one, the artist engaged his audience as if he or she were a member of the public. The first iteration was a press release from the Dia Art Foundation dated October 2, 2003, extending an invitation to the public to come join a "Streamside Day celebration" that was set to take place on Saturday, October 11, 2003, between 2:30 and 7:00 p.m. in a new residential development community called Streamside Knolls, located in Fishkill, New York.<sup>82</sup> Advertised highlights included a parade, animal costumes for children, live music, and a "barbeque dinner with hot dogs and hamburgers, corn on the cob, pumpkin pies, ice cream, lemonade, and cotton candy." Participants in the Streamside Day celebration, the press release continued, would also appear in a film by Pierre Huyghe that would form a record of the event.

The second iteration of the work was, of course, the Streamside Day celebration. The third was the film. Opening with a scene from a paradisaical landscape, the filmic narrative is propelled forward through a myriad of cultural references: the utopian social projects of the nineteenth-century (the new residential community formed out of the primeval forest), Disney animation (the emergence of a Bambi), and romantic landscape painting. From the depths of an old-growth forest, a fawn unsteadily emerges. Crossing a stream and wandering down a path, it comes to the forest's edge. Instead of marking a natural transition from forest to field, the forest's edge is abruptly sheared away by the raw incursion of a new development's

---

<sup>82</sup> Dia Art Foundation press release October 2, 2003: "Dia Art Foundation Invites Public to Streamside Day Celebration and to be Part of Pierre Huyghe's Film 'Streamside Day Follies,'" <http://www.diacenter.org/dia/press/huyghe.html> (accessed July 16, 2004).

construction. The deserted site is dotted with unoccupied houses. Descending from the forest, the fawn picks its way through the freshly paved streets and arrives at a particular house, whose front door stands open. Passing through the door, the final shot of the first segment shows the fawn standing alert and splay-legged in a freshly painted, unfurnished interior. Huyghe's film then cuts abruptly to its second section, a young family moving to this new community.

The myth that structures these two sections—nature is overtaken and submerged by the advancing wave of culture—is brought forward in the third section, the Streamside Day celebration. Designed to create a community identity out of nothing, Huyghe orchestrated this celebration with a series of “typical” community-formation scenes. The event begins with the planting of a tree. Children are offered animal costumes to wear. At 3:30 p.m. a parade with a fire engine, police car, mail truck, school bus, two floats, and an ice-cream truck make their way through Streamside Knolls. Opening remarks by public dignitaries take place. A Streamside Day cake and live music follow dinner, and the public is encouraged to take pictures throughout the event. The film ends with the day's end and the celebration's desultory disintegration.

The fourth iteration of the work took place at Dia: Chelsea. Unlike most contemporary film and video installations, *Streamside Day Follies* was not exhibited as a continuous loop. Rather, its regularly spaced-out screenings were dependant on the ceremonial formation and disintegration of a projection room that periodically came together to form a haphazard pentagon in the center of the exhibition space out

of five mobile walls. Guided on rails installed in the ceiling, the walls moved slowly through the gallery. When stationary, each wall concealed a faintly visible colored-pencil line drawing applied directly to it. Each drawing mapped a particular locale of Streamside Knolls. When the walls finished moving to the center, Huyghe's film was projected inside the ad hoc pavilion.<sup>83</sup> The obverse sides of the walls were faced in a shimmering blue-green film that referenced the greenish glow emitted by a television screen: while the film was shown, these walls became the first impression of the work. When the film ended, the walls retracted to their original positions along the perimeter of the space, restoring the gallery to its pristine state. At this stage of the work's cycle, the white interiors of the walls of the projection room blended into the white walls of the gallery. Combined with the disappearance of the projection, the focus of the "work" shifted entirely to the audience, which, once liberated from the confines of the walls, scattered throughout the gallery space. Temporarily without a work to focus on, the audience's attention diffused into a party atmosphere until the walls formed once again into a projection room at the center of the exhibition space.

For Huyghe, the exhibition at Dia: Chelsea functioned as a *mise-en-scène* for Streamside Days, providing a structure "within which things could happen." His choreography of the celebration was open at all points to accident, modification, and ultimately to the possibility of future Streamside Day celebrations to be staged by the community, independent of the artist's guiding hand. Here, fiction was designed to precede and give rise to fact: "What interested me," Huyghe told Baker, "was...how a

---

<sup>83</sup> The running time was approximately twenty-six minutes.

story could in fact produce a certain kind of reality. An *additif* of reality. I'm not speaking about change here. In *Streamside Day Follies*, I wanted to create a fiction that would lead to a *fête*, a celebration, an event that could be repeated."<sup>84</sup>

Two formative elements of *Streamside Day Follies* crystallize the logic that has grown out of the evolution of film and video installation. First, when Huyghe chooses to reverse the usual order of fact and fiction so that fiction precedes and creates fact, he applies the kind of backward causation produced by the loop and overturns assumptions about the relation between fact and fiction—or, as Baker asserts, Huyghe uses “representational conventions as a mode for doing things in reality, as opposed to documenting reality within representation.”<sup>85</sup> Huyghe draws broader links between his reversal of fiction and fact and the reversal of images and “real” events:

But now things have changed, and ultimately representation or images became more important than real events. We can see this with the current war, we can witness the way the media twists an event, the way representation is dictating the event. Today, an event, its image and its commentary have become one object.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, the breakdown of the linear narrative is not restricted to the museum. Enwezor proposes that the exhibition is a kind of “meta-language of mediation that constructs a tautological system in which the artwork is bound up in its own self-referentiality through the relationships established between mediums, objects and systems”<sup>87</sup> Embedded in the temporality of the film and video installation, as Boris

---

<sup>84</sup> Huyghe, 84.

<sup>85</sup> Huyghe, 104.

<sup>86</sup> Huyghe, 83.

<sup>87</sup> Enwezor, “The Black Box,” 42.



Groys has demonstrated, is the potential for the intrusion of the everyday. With his loop, Huyghe realizes the potential produced by this intrusion in two ways: first, the oscillation between the museum and the world, which he arrives at through his successively staged events, and, second, through the pivotal role of the audience in setting in motion this series of events. Huyghe elaborates on the construction of the event through the analogy of the *retournelle*.<sup>88</sup> A *retournelle* describes a refrain that repeats throughout an orchestral movement. With *Streamside Day Follies*, Huyghe wanted the event he set in motion to repeat as an annual holiday. In this way the event would become a *retournelle*, or a loop, indissolubly linking the exhibition space to the outside world—potentially forever—given the will of the Streamside Knolls community.

### 3.5 Conclusion

By bringing the audience into the center of each iteration of his work, Huyghe reconnects the museum audience to a broader group, the public. Writing about *Streamside Day Follies*, David Joselit is struck by the parallels between the formation and disintegration of the mobile walls in Dia: Chelsea's gallery and Huyghe's attempt in the Streamside Day celebration to draw a sense of a public sphere out of what are structurally and socially private spaces. Instead of repeating the formulations of the audience made by the Dia generation, Huyghe brings into relief contemporary understandings of the public. Joselit concludes: "If there is a political message in *Streamside Day Follies*, then it lies in Huyghe's impossible hope that the

---

<sup>88</sup> Huyghe, 84.

sentimentality enveloping places like Streamside might somehow be perverted to *social* rather than merely personal ends.”<sup>89</sup>

Joselit also draws parallels between the media coverage of the war on Iraq and historical and contemporary video installation art:

Formalism has a pretty bad name among socially concerned and left-oriented artists and art historians, yet we live in a world structured by a rigorous discipline of form. We’re haunted by a sense of our own irrelevance as critical or aesthetic practitioners, afraid that our whole enterprise is little more than a fancy mode of retailing. And yet all around us, political speech, in which I include coverage of the Iraq war, is conducted in terms that would be familiar to many a viewer of video installations or underground films from the 1960s to the present day....<sup>90</sup>

The form that the media coverage takes is as important a vehicle for the political message as the content. Joselit notes similarities between Andy Warhol’s *Empire* and the camera work coming from Baghdad in the early days of the United States-led invasion of Iraq. A similar parallel exists between the loop as a temporal form inside and outside the museum. Griffin, writing about the coverage immediately following the destruction of the World Trade Center, observes that the loop has become the temporal form that best describes our historical moment. In film and video installation, the loop has emerged relatively recently. While its emergence was a consequence of institutional pressure—the need to have a temporal work that could be seen by waves of viewers entering and leaving a gallery—its success (and here, finally, I agree with Beech) was not simply a result of this institutional pressure. Rather, I think the loop has been successful because of the way it parallels time forms

---

<sup>89</sup> David Joselit, “Inside the Light Cube,” *Artforum* 42, no. 7 (March 2004): 159.

<sup>90</sup> David Joselit, “Commanding View,” *Artforum* 42 no. 5 (January 2004): 45.

that already exist in the world, as Huyghe's work demonstrates. This success has produced the ambivalent reception of contemporary film and video installation.

## Chapter 4

### Confusions of Nearness: The Virtual and the Phenomenological in Projected Video Environments<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction: Mapping the Studio, Mapping the Museum

Bruce Nauman recorded the video component of his 2001 installation *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)* over forty-two nights in his studio in New Mexico in the summer of 2000. He shot seven different perspectives of his studio using infrared tape loaded onto a surveillance camera that could only record for an hour at a time. He edited forty-two hour-long segments into seven videos that were five hours and approximately forty minutes long. The time length chosen for the work was made with the audience in mind. In an interview, Nauman told the curator Michael Auping:

It just felt like it needed to be so long that you wouldn't necessarily sit down and watch the whole thing but could come and go....I wanted that feeling that the piece was just there...ongoing being itself. I wanted the piece to have a real-time quality. I like the idea of knowing it is going on whether you are there or not.<sup>2</sup>

From January 10 to July 27, 2002, *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)* was installed at Dia: Chelsea in a square room built inside a former industrial space.<sup>3</sup>

Within, seven greenish-grey infrared video loops of Nauman's studio space were

---

<sup>1</sup> When I use the term projected video environment throughout this chapter, I do so to differentiate its topic from the broader area of video installation art. Projected video environments depend on, as the term suggests, video projections, whereas video installations can draw on a broader array of output technologies.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Nauman and Michael Auping, "A Thousand Words: Bruce Nauman Talks about Mapping the Studio," *Artforum* 40, no. 7 (March 2002): 121.

<sup>3</sup> Chelsea is a neighborhood in New York City that in the late 1990s became the new epicenter of commercial art galleries. The Dia Art Foundation specializes in art from the 1960s and 1970s, including collections of work by Joseph Beuys, Dan Flavin, Richard Serra, Agnes Martin, and Andy Warhol, in addition to Bruce Nauman. A private foundation, it was founded in 1974 with the mandate to support contemporary art through long-term commissions. In 1987 the Dia Art Foundation opened an exhibition space in a four-story converted warehouse in Chelsea. Dia: Chelsea closed its doors in January 2004. In 2003 the Dia Art Foundation opened Dia: Beacon (Beacon is a small town north of New York City on the Hudson River) in a former Nabisco plant.

projected onto the four walls of the square room. The glowing projections reflected onto the smooth, highly polished concrete floor, merging the projections with the space. Individual pixels quivered on the walls like sequins, shimmying under the influence of a slight air current. Seven high-backed office chairs on castors provided seating for the audience in the center of the space. Visitors to Nauman's installation could stand, walk around, sit, or wheel themselves across the floor.

Evenly spaced around the gallery, the projections show the detritus of Nauman's work: a stepladder, leftover lumber, C-clamps, partially opened shipping crates, a plaster-mixing tub, a drawing tube, three mismatched chairs arranged in a semicircle, as well as an unstretched, unfinished painting dangling from the wall. Over the videos' duration, objects flip-flop from wall to floor, change place, or disappear altogether, indicating that the videos, which initially appear to show a seamless chronology, do anything but. Multiple soundtracks of incidental noises in and outside the studio record a coyote's bark, the restless movement of horses in the corral outside, the crack of thunder, and a distant train whistle. These sounds are punctuated by the drone of an air conditioner and other less identifiable bumps, crashes, and bangs from inside Nauman's studio.

Like John Cage's 1952 composition *4'33"*, Nauman's *Mapping the Studio I* (*Fat Chance, John Cage*) depends on a field of unintended, unplanned movement and sound, or the chance and indeterminacy created by the animals and insects who appear in Nauman's studio. Glowing pinpoints of light dance across the screen and resolve into the nervous, stop-and-go motion of mice and lizards, exaggerating the

already-present pulse and quiver of the video pixels. Moths scud across the camera lens, leaving vaporous jet streams of light. The appearance of a black, tailless cat is an event. Like the moth, the cat's eyes, reflective twin points, create phosphorescent trails as the cat looks this way and that, hunting for mice. From one corner of the Dia: Chelsea space, a hoarse meow can be heard, while in the other the cat lopes across a corner of Nauman's studio, disappearing through a doorway into another room. Incrementally, cat, mouse, lizard, and moth map the contours of Nauman's studio and the objects within.

In a 2003 *October* roundtable discussion on the projected image in art, the avant-garde filmmaker Anthony McCall argues that on the one hand, the reception of video and film involves entering "the elsewhere of a moving image."<sup>4</sup> In doing so, one's physical body is left behind, remaining "rooted to the spot." On the other hand, for McCall, the reception of sculpture and architectural space involves moving, or "measuring what you see with your eyes and your physical body." When it was shown at Dia: Chelsea, *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)* directly contradicted this split between physical action and the reception of the moving image described by McCall. With no sculptures to knock over or paintings to brush up against, the projections, coupled with the mobile chairs and the dark room, created an atmosphere of mobility and uncertainty for the visitor to Nauman's installation, which drew on the exhilaration of the bumper-car ride and the mystery of the tunnel of love in a fairground midway rather than the conventional museum experience. Suspended

---

<sup>4</sup> Anthony McCall, in George Baker et al., "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 76.

between a moving and a still image by the sporadic nature of the videotaped action, *Mapping the Studio I* (Fat Chance, John Cage)'s projections also set up a temporal suspense that informed the kind of attention its audience gave to it. These spatial and temporal conditions produced two diametrically opposed responses from visitors that were described by critics from the popular and art press: boredom and full attention. The art critic Frances Richard reported that "[v]isitors sit in the middle of the room...where they soon grow bored, but the experience is also soothing, narcotic...."<sup>5</sup> "A cat and mouse game" was a phrase that came to mind the second time I entered the installation at Dia: Chelsea. Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times* came up with a similar analogy when he compared the visitors to night watchmen, suspended between sensory deprivation and the professional requirement to pay attention: "After a while the tendency is simply to stop watching and just gaze passively, the empty room becoming strangely comforting, with much of what you register happening unconsciously on the periphery of your vision...."<sup>6</sup> As Kimmelman's comparison to night watchmen implied, the on-screen movement in *Mapping the Studio I* activated its audience's peripheral vision, creating the impression that they were required to remain at full attention before seemingly empty rooms. In his review, however, Kimmelman failed to acknowledge the jolt of pleasure produced by onscreen movement.

---

<sup>5</sup> Frances Richard, "Bruce Nauman-DIA Center for the Arts" Sperone Westwater <http://www.speronewestwater.com/cgi-bin/iowa/articles/record.html?record=158> (accessed August 26, 2008)

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kimmelman "Art in Review: Bruce Nauman 'Mapping the Studio I,'" *New York Times*, July 5, 2002, E35.

The audience's response to the work was also a collaborative effort. Tim Griffin, a former art critic for *Time Out New York*, notes: "When someone spots something, whether rodent or feline, everybody turns to face the same direction and starts pointing joyously. Art becomes a game of cat and mouse in a collective...version of peekaboo..."<sup>7</sup> The dark, uncluttered space also created a context for people to behave in unexpected and unpredictable manners. Griffin continues:

Audiences inevitably start clowning around...folks obviously find it hard not to start spinning themselves about the space like chess pieces on a board without squares. I saw one couple in their sixties whirl each other around in a whimsical, romantic dance.

When I was there, two girls transformed their experience into sentry duty, perched at taut attention in the middle of the space. Facing opposite directions so as to miss nothing, they eagerly pointed out various disturbances in the projections' electronic fields: "I saw a dog, look!" "Where?" "Over there!" And then one turned to the other and asked, "Do you think it's a live video?" An intertwined couple vigorously made out; a group of women straddled the chairs and gleefully propelled themselves across the smooth floor; and an unhappy young man wandered up to me and asked, What's supposed to happen?

When inside the projected video environment *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)*, visitors simultaneously mapped the physical space of the gallery's interior and the virtual space of Nauman's studio moment by moment, inch by inch. Visitors making out, dancing, propelling themselves across the space or

---

<sup>7</sup> Tim Griffin, "Cut to the Chase," *Time Out New York*, January 24–31 2002, 47.



surveilling it, mimicked the on-screen movement and thus created, as Charlie Finch notes in an online review, a synchronicity between themselves and the on-screen animals, thereby immersing themselves in the virtual space. “By sitting on one of these chairs and propelling oneself across Dia’s exquisite stone floors...one can become one of the animals...and achieve the illusion of really being in Bruce’s studio.”<sup>8</sup> The distinctive characteristics of the Dia: Chelsea version of *Mapping the Studio I* (*Fat Chance, John Cage*)—the darkness and the mobility offered by the chairs—created a set of circumstances critical to its reception. This becomes especially apparent when considered in relation to the version of *Mapping the Studio I* (*Fat Chance, John Cage*) that was installed in the basement of Dia: Beacon in the late summer of 2003. When I visited it, incidental light entered the space through both the translucent screens and the work’s entryway, and the chairs in the center were not on casters: these two changes removed from the work two critical elements.<sup>9</sup> Mobility and darkness, virtuality and the placement of the viewer at the center of that darkness came together in the installation at Dia: Chelsea to produce the effect remarked on by members of its audience: the walls of the gallery in Chelsea may have been overlaid by the ghostly doubles of mice that could, at that very moment, have been scurrying under a doorjamb away from a cat in Nauman’s New Mexico studio. Their full immersion in an environment that was created out of both actual and virtual elements resulted in a sensory response to and an intellectual engagement with both.

---

<sup>8</sup> Charlie Finch, “Turn 'Em Loose, Bruce,” *ArtNet Magazine*, <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/cfinch/finch1-14-02.asp> (accessed May 21, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> I have been told that it has since then been reinstalled in a better location at Dia: Beacon.

## 4.2 Immersion and Autonomy

When writing about audience and participation, Rudolf Arnheim observed a range of possible engagements: from applause in the theatre, to the call and response required of the faithful in the church liturgy, to the “total involvement [or immersion] of all participants.”<sup>10</sup> Oliver Grau defines immersion as an experience that in most cases is “mentally absorbing and...is characterized by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening.”<sup>11</sup> As Grau and others have shown, the concept of immersion has a long history in Western visual culture. From antiquity through the Renaissance and the nineteenth century to the present day, Grau describes an archaeology of “immersive” image spaces, or works that seek to enclose viewers within the fabric of the image itself: a cycle of frescoes in the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii (c. 60 BCE) dedicated to the cult of Dionysus fill a visitor’s visual field with life-sized renderings of figures; frescoes of a garden in the Villa Livia near Prima porta (c. 20 BCE) create an illusion of nature brought indoors, as do renderings of hunting scenes for the study of Pope Clement VI in his new palace in Avignon, the *Chambre du Cerf* (c.1343); in the Renaissance Baldessare Peruzzi’s *Sala delle Prospettive* (1516) foreshadows nineteenth century panoramas through its use of a continuous horizon line.<sup>12</sup> Exemplary of the immersive totality of nineteenth-century panorama structures is the way that they break down the

---

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, “The Coming and Going of Images.” In *Leonardo* 3, No. 3, 2000: 167.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, trans. Gloria Costance (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>12</sup> For more examples, and more detailed descriptions of these works see Oliver Grau, “Historic Spaces of Illusions,” in *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, 25–89.

psychological distance between observer and work. Panoramas were shown in enclosed rotundas. Visitors would enter a viewing platform from which to see the panorama. A balustrade would separate the visitor from the image, keeping them in a position from which the image's upper and lower limits were imperceptible. Overhead lighting illuminating the image would also be out of visible range, leaving the viewer with the impression that the image itself provided the light, an effect later repeated in cinema, television, and computer screens. A prominent critic of the panorama, Johann August Eberhard described his response to being incompletely immersed in the virtual environment it created using terms usually reserved for the sudden onset of physical illness, especially an anxiety attack. In *Handbuch der Ästhetik* (1805) Eberhard observes:

I sway between reality and unreality, between nature and non-nature, between truth and appearance. My thoughts and my spirits are set in motion, forced to swing from side to side, like going round in circles or being rocked in a boat. I can only explain the dizziness and sickness that befall the unprepared observer of the panorama in this way....I feel myself trapped in the net of a contradictory dream world...not even comparison with the bodies that surround me can awake me from this terrifying nightmare, which I must go on dreaming against my will.<sup>13</sup>

His criticism focused on the inability of the panorama to create a perfect illusion for its audience, leaving it unable to distinguish among the actual and virtual elements of the environment—or “truth and appearance”—and the resulting perceptual destabilization.

Thirty to forty years before viewer participation first played a central role in happenings, Fluxus, and avant-garde performance art, Peter Weibel claims that

---

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Grau, *Virtual Art*, 63–64.

virtuality and interactivity had already been well established in modern art by the 1920s with Bauhaus and Dada. These early-twentieth-century explorations shared strategies with earlier immersive works, such as the panorama, for removing the psychological distance between viewer and work. What distinguishes these works from the earlier examples is the invention of electricity and its potential for generating artificial light and movement, as well as an explicit invitation to the viewer to actively engage. In *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture* (1929), László Moholy-Nagy describes an evolution of material and static volumes that moves toward a kinetic and “virtual” experience. When observing both Bauhaus student work and everyday virtualities, Moholy-Nagy notes two forms of volume: “The circumscribed mass of measurable weight” that is tangible in three dimensions, and

[t]he virtual contour, apperceived merely visually, resulting from motion, which—although bodiless—is yet an outstanding plastic element of creation, recognizable on the three-dimensional plane. [Resulting mainly from motion of one-dimensional linear elements (bodies).] Therefore...sculpture is both the path from material-volume to virtual volume and from factual grasp to visual, relative grasp.<sup>14</sup>

Examples of everyday virtual volumes provided by Moholy-Nagy include photographs of a gyroscope—when set in motion, rigid materials optically disintegrate—and a merry-go-round on a midway in Blackpool, England. Limned with light, the merry-go-round’s whirling contours produce a temporary illusion of volume created out of light and movement. Experiments in kinetic art from the 1920s concentrated on inciting the audience to set in motion works that create illusory, or

---

<sup>14</sup> László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann (New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, Inc., 1932), 134.

virtual, bodies and movement through optical tricks. Like a gyroscope, Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* from 1920 requires the viewer to set the optical machine in motion. Unlike the gyroscope, the viewer is then instructed to stand one meter away: the location of the viewer is crucial to activating perceptual experiences.

Like the panorama, these new electrified-light environments produced uncertainty over "reality and unreality," in Eberhard's words. Moholy-Nagy (like Robert Venturi approximately fifty years later) celebrated the new virtual landscape created by commerce, the news media, and the new forms of transportation.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Venturi, Moholy-Nagy saw the new electronic signage proliferating throughout everyday life as raw material waiting for the deft hand of the artist to realize its full potential, rather than a postmodern semiotics of architecture:

[L]ight—as spatial projection—is an outstanding aid in attaining virtual volume... The night life of a city can no longer be imagined without the varied play of electrical advertisements, or night air traffic without the lighted beacons along the way. The reflectors and neon tubes of advertising signs, the moving lighted letters of storefronts, the rotating mechanisms of colored electric bulbs, the broad strips of the electric news bulletin, are all elements of a new field of expression, which will probably not have to wait much longer for its creative artist.<sup>16</sup>

Farkas Molnar's U-Theatre, Andreas Weininger's Spherical Theatre, and Walter Gropius' Total Theatre were all unrealized attempts by Bauhaus members to experiment with artificial light sources that were already being used in both everyday life and the movie-picture studio. Molnar, Weininger and Gropius set out to break

---

<sup>15</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Moholy-Nagy, 132.

away from the existing model of proscenium and spectator found in the movie theater, by structuring new relations between film, light, performance, and the theater audience from various angles and distances:

While artificial light sources are used to an amazing extent in the motion picture studio and on the stage, the present-day painter or sculptor has hardly any notion of how to employ them. It should be mentioned that at the same time the stage, and more especially the motion picture, are still far from rational in their practical use of light. The splendidly equipped motion picture studios should not plan their lighting—or their architecture—on unintelligent principles of imitation of nature, but should exploit the special possibilities of light.<sup>17</sup>

Moholy-Nagy proposed replacing the traditional movie screen and its connotation of the picture frame with convex or concave screens of different sizes and shapes. In a 1924 version of his models, three films were to be projected simultaneously onto the inner surface of a hemisphere.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s op art and kinetic art continued these experiments in virtuality, movement, and audience interaction through paintings, sculptures, and environments. As a movement, op art included painterly experiments with surface kinetics, in which colors and patterns were used to create visual effects such as afterimages and trompe-l'oeil. Vibrating colors, concentric circles, and pulsating moiré patterns are characteristic of works by artists such as Victor Vasarely, Richard Anusziwicz, Larry Poons, Yaacov Agam, and Bridget Riley. As viewers walk before Riley's paintings, for example, its appearance changes. "In my earlier paintings, I wanted the space between the picture plane and the spectator to be active. It was in

---

<sup>17</sup> Moholy-Nagy, 142.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Kirby, "The Uses of Film in the New Theatre," *The Tulane Drama Review* 11, no.1, (Autumn, 1966): 50.

that space, paradoxically, the painting ‘took place,’” Riley summarizes. She continues: “It is important that the painting can be *inhabited*, so that the mind’s eye, or the eye’s mind, can move about it credibly.”<sup>19</sup> Jesús Rafael Soto produced kinetic art through the illusion of movement. When talking about his work, Soto spoke of “virtual relations” and extended these relations from the surface within a room into the “environment”—simultaneously drawing the viewer into the work of art.<sup>20</sup> Spectator participation extended from adjustable paintings to sculptures, and from sculptures into space. In Soto’s *Penetrables* series in the 1960s, spectators experienced the work haptically by passing through a field of suspended nylon filament. In 1963 the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel exhibited its first collective work, a labyrinth that is still on display at the Museum Cohue in Vannes, France.<sup>21</sup> Visitors are expected to enter the structure and get lost, embodying the museum’s exhibition motto: *Défense de ne pas participer. Défense de ne pas toucher.* (It is forbidden not to participate. It is forbidden not to touch).

Notwithstanding these art-historical precedents, when the audience members in Nauman’s projected video environment measured both virtual and the actual space

---

<sup>19</sup> Bridget Riley, “The Experience of Painting,” interview by Mel Gooding, in *The Eye’s Mind: Bridget Riley. Collected Writings 1965–1999*, ed. Robert Kudielka (London: Thames and Hudson, in association with the Serpentine Gallery, London, and De Montfort University, 1999), 122. Early in her career, Riley worked to develop pictorial relations between her paintings and their audience out of which, at a certain moment, a particular visual memory or a phenomenal sensation could be recognized. *Movement in Squares* (1961) and *Crest* (1964) were studies in sharply defined black-and-white contrast. Across the picture plane of *Movement in Squares*, dynamic movement was arrived at through optical illusions that were developed with a minimal use of patterns: this technique established new spatial relations between the viewer and the surface.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Weibel, “It is Forbidden Not to Touch: Some Remarks on the (Forgotten Parts of the) History of Interactivity and Virtuality,” in *MediaArtHistories*, ed. Oliver Grau (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 21–42.

<sup>21</sup> A group founded in 1961, it was made up of artists Horacio-Garcia Rossi, Julio Le Parc, François Morellet, Francisco Sobrino, Joel Stein and Jean-Pierre Yvara.

of the environment with their bodies and their eyes, they inadvertently placed themselves at the heart of a fiercely fought debate over the split between the virtual and the phenomenological. Action, participation, and the performative relation between visitors' bodies, the artwork, and the enveloping space all carry a significant ideological charge. A break away from immersion and virtuality, and more specifically away from the integration of "illusionistic" film and video into an environment, begins in Nauman's historical context. This debate finds its roots in key texts by theorists of minimalist art and structural film. For the champions of these movements, the success of the interaction between audience, work, and space depended on the distance, or autonomy, of the visitor in relation to the space and the object, the autonomy of the artwork from the media world that surrounds it, and in particular the autonomy of film from Hollywood narrative film and the illusions it delivered to its audience.

In his 1966 essay "Notes on Sculpture," the minimalist sculptor Robert Morris established the conditions for "new sculpture." Beginning with the ideal scale relation between the viewer and the sculpture (or the object), he wrote, "The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between that constant, one's body size, and the object."<sup>22</sup> Depending on the size of the object, the space between the viewer and the object also enters into play, establishing a performative relationship between subject and object: "it is just this distance between object and subject that creates a

---

<sup>22</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1968), 231.



more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary.”<sup>23</sup> For all these factors to work, not only is the size of the object in relation to the subject critical, so too is the size of the space of the room: “itself...a structuring factor both in its cubic shape and in terms of the kinds of compression different sized and proportioned rooms can effect upon the object-subject terms.”<sup>24</sup> All of these factors are “real” elements present at the same time, in the same place.

An equally influential text is a 1966 interview with the minimalist sculptor Tony Smith. Published in *Artforum*, Smith describes a nighttime ride he took in the 1950s with his students on the yet-to-be-finished New Jersey Turnpike. He spoke of the unfinished, unmarked turnpike’s limitlessness, its dual evocation of culture and experience without cultural precedent. “The experience in the road,” he continued, “was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that’s the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.”<sup>25</sup> This established—not the end of art—but the beginning of minimalism and its declaration of the “death of painting,” or the death of illusionistic representation.

Structural film was an avant-garde film movement that first made its appearance in both the United States and the United Kingdom in the mid-1960s. Filmmakers and artists such as Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton were concerned with interrogating the film’s apparatus: the projector from which film is projected, the

---

<sup>23</sup> Morris, 233.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Smith and Sam Wagstaff, “Talking with Tony Smith,” *Artforum* 1, no 4 (December 1966): 18.

theater in which film is shown, and the screen on which it is seen; and structural elements, such as time and movement, flatness, filmstock grain, and light.<sup>26</sup> In his book *Visionary Film*, Sitney defined structural film as a “cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film”<sup>27</sup> And Peter Gidal, one of the foremost champions of structural film in the United Kingdom observed:

Structural/Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist.....An avant-garde film defined by its development towards increased materialism and materialist function does not represent, or document, anything. The film produces certain relations between segments, between what the camera is aimed at and the way that “image” is presented. The dialectic of the film is established in that space of tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement, and the supposed reality that is represented. Consequently a continual attempt to destroy the illusion is necessary.<sup>28</sup>

The formal terms established by Morris in his essay set up an axiomatic relationship between space, body and object that displaced earlier explorations of virtuality by Bauhaus, Dada, kinetic art, and then op art. Smith’s “end of art” provided the conceptual framework for both minimalism and the criticisms of contemporary projected video environments, as did Sitney’s and Gidal’s repudiation of the illusionism celebrated by Moholy-Nagy in the effort to sever avant-garde film from Hollywood cinema. As the video artist Dan Graham put it: “A premise of 1960s

---

<sup>26</sup> Other Structural filmmakers include George Landow (aka Owen Land), Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Joyce Wieland, Ernie Gehr, Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, Kurt Kren, and Peter Kubelka.

<sup>27</sup> P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 348. Canonical examples of Structural films include Tony Conrad’s *The Flicker* (1965), Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* (1966-67) and *One Second in Montreal* (1969); Paul Sharits’ *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968); Hollis Frampton’s *Zorns Lemma* (1970); Ernie Gehr’s *Serene Velocity* (1970); and George Landow’s *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1971).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Gidal, “Theory & Definition of Structural/Materialist Film,” *Studio International*, 190.978, 1975: 189.

modernist art was to present the present as immediacy—as pure phenomenological consciousness without the contamination of historical or other a priori meaning.”<sup>29</sup>

These ideas are brought together in Anthony McCall’s film *Line Describing a Cone*. Made in 1973, it was first screened as an independent film, and more recently exhibited in art museums.<sup>30</sup> In an interview with Gautam Dasgupta, McCall described in detail the viewing requirements of the film, and their correspondence to its conceptual framework: “*Line Describing a Cone* is what I term a solid light film. It deals with the projected light beam itself, rather than treating the light beam as a mere carrier of coded information, which is decoded when it strikes a flat surface.”<sup>31</sup> The projection is first perceptible as a white dot on the black ground of the exhibition’s or theater’s wall. Gradually this dot grows into a line, which eventually forms an arc that slowly grows into a circle. The projection’s duration is governed by the slow emergence of this circle onto the wall perpendicular to the beam of light. As the circle grows, between the screen and the projector the beam of light evolves into a gradually growing cone, embodied forth by particles in the air illuminated by the projected light.

McCall originally conceived the work as an assault on cinematic conventions:

“This film...refers to nothing beyond this real time. It contains no illusion. It is a

---

<sup>29</sup> Dan Graham, “Video in Relation to Architecture,” in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990), 186.

<sup>30</sup> *Line Describing a Cone* was included in the exhibition *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964–1977* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 18, 2001–January 6, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Anthony McCall, interview by Gautam Dasgupta, “Interview: Formalist Cinema and Politics,” *Performing Arts Journal* 1, no. 3, (Winter, 1977): 52.

primary experience, not secondary: i.e., the space is real, not referential; the time is real, not referential.”<sup>32</sup> The projector was to be set up inside the exhibition or theatrical space, not cloistered in a projection booth. The viewing space was to be “entirely empty of chairs or other furniture.” The space was to be “absolutely pitch dark.” There was to be no screen: the “beam merely ‘stops’ at the wall. The light of the beam from the projector was to be made visible through “contact from particles, in the air, be they from dust, humidity or cigarette smoke. Smoking should not be prohibited.”<sup>33</sup> For the museum or theater visitor, *Line Describing a Cone* provided no singular point of aural, visual, or temporal focus, rather making it possible for the visitor to listen to the rattle of the sixteen-millimetre projector, watch the growing circle on the wall, and the growing cone between wall and projector. Most importantly for McCall, they move around a space empty except for the projector. This provides the viewer with the opportunity to interrupt the cone of light when they step between the projector and the screen. This performative dimension becomes more complex when more than one visitor becomes immersed in both room and work, as each person’s behavior in the space affects the other’s when they temporarily alter the shape of both the cone and the circle of light.

While both Minimalist art and Structural film established the terms of his historical and conceptual context, Nauman is typically grouped with process artists, or post-minimalists who were active in the 1960s and the 1970s. Like Morris and McCall, they considered the corporeal experience of the visitor to be integral to their

---

<sup>32</sup> McCall: 52.

<sup>33</sup> McCall: 52.

work. Like McCall, they used video and film as one of many sculptural materials. Unlike McCall and the Structural filmmakers, they use illusionistic spaces, or video and film as carriers of “coded information.”<sup>34</sup> Artists not typically associated with postminimalism such as Peter Campus and Dan Graham also made the audience essential to their work when they created environments where viewers could wander through feedback loops of live video cameras and monitors. In Campus’ installation *Aeon* (1977) the visitor enters an empty, dark room, only to discover her or his virtual double inverted, enlarged and projected onto one of the four walls. The (limited) tension lies in the fact that she or he can only see the projected video image of her/himself in her/his peripheral vision, provoking the visitor to “chase” the image of her/himself in a fruitless attempt to get a better look. Dan Graham’s *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974) uses mirrors, time-delayed video cameras and monitors to set up a spatialized representation of the present and a series of immediate pasts. Like Campus’ *Aeon*, the work would only be activated when the visitor steps into the space. In *Present Continuous Past(s)*, a mirror reflection of the visitors in the installation represents present time. The video camera tapes what is immediately in front of it and the entire scene that is reflected on the opposite mirrored wall. Graham’s description of the work best sums up its temporal *mise en abyme*:

The image seen by the camera (reflecting everything in the room) appears eight seconds later in the video monitor (via a tape delay placed between the video recorder, which is recording, and a second video recorder, which is playing the recording back)....A person viewing the monitor sees both the image of himself or herself of eight seconds earlier, *and* what was reflected on the mirror from the monitor eight seconds prior to that—sixteen seconds in the

---

<sup>34</sup> See my description of Keith Sonnier’s installation in chapter 3.

past (the camera view of eight seconds prior was playing back on the monitor eight seconds earlier, and this was reflected on the mirror along with the then present reflection to the viewer). An infinite regress of time continuums within time continuums (always separated by eight-second intervals) within time continuums is created.<sup>35</sup>

When writing about video feedback in general and the work in particular, Graham observed: “ Two models of time are contrasted in *Present Continuous Past(s)*, the traditional Renaissance perspective static present-time, which is seen, in this work, as the (self) image(s) in the mirror(s), and the time of the video feedback loop.”<sup>36</sup> The mandate of this splitting of time was no less than the splitting of the self into subject and object:

use of video time-delay in conjunction with the mirror allows the spectator to see what is normally visually unavailable: the simultaneity of his or her self as both subject and object....a spectator realizes himself/herself as acting and acted upon: In causing a reflection and at the same time finding the self reflected, he/she divides into subject and object, into an awareness and an image. The image separates the individual, but is it he/she who forms the image or is it the image that describes him/her?<sup>37</sup>

In the process, Graham extends Morris’ project: the viewer becomes both the subject and the image under consideration.

A premise of 1960s modernist art was to present the present as immediacy—as pure phenomenological consciousness without the contamination of historical or other a priori meaning. The world could be experienced as pure presence...Each privileged present-time situation was to be totally unique or new. My video time-delay, installations, and performance designs use this modernist notion of phenomenological immediacy, foregrounding an awareness of the presence of the viewer’s own perceptual process; at the same time they critique this immediacy by showing the impossibility of locating a pure present tense.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Graham, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Graham, 185.

<sup>37</sup> Graham, 185–186.

<sup>38</sup> Graham, 186.

Campus' and Graham's work requires the audience to maintain a detached awareness of their environment rather than becoming fully immersed into it. Technology plays an integral role in the production of these performative, phenomenological experiences that requires both an intellectual and an emotional distance.

Nauman's installations from the 1960s and 1970s, as Janet Kraynak points out, "assertively engage and operate upon the beholder's body, senses, and mind."<sup>39</sup> The experience that Nauman asked his participants to undertake—unlike his later work *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)*—more closely resembled an endurance course than a fleeting moment of misrecognition and frustration (Campus) or a bloodless reflection on the experience of duration (Graham). For example *Green Light Corridor* (1970) is one of a series of constricted spaces by Nauman that are built within the exhibition space. The installation consists of a narrow hallway, nearly forty feet in length, with walls ten feet high but only approximately one foot apart. Museum or gallery visitors interested in experiencing the work can only do so by turning sideways and shuffling awkwardly from left to right or right to left along the corridor formed by the two walls. The haptic senses are privileged over sight: to see anything but the wall, inches away from her or his nose, the participant must turn her or his head perpendicular to her or his feet. As its title suggests, the corridor is lit from above, bathing the participant in green fluorescent lights. The intensity of the color produces a magenta afterimage for the participant after he or she emerges from the piece into natural light. According to the artist's catalog *raisonne*, when the work

---

<sup>39</sup> Janet Kraynak, "Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman's Environments," *Grey Room* 10 (Winter 2003): 23.

was first exhibited at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, “the corridor was set perpendicular to a window, which allowed viewers, on exiting the piece, to see a spectacular view of ocean and sky as if through proverbial rose-colored glasses.”<sup>40</sup> In describing *Green Light Corridor*, Nauman remarked: “The Green was a very strong piece, but I had some people go in and find it very relaxing and other people find it very intense. I found it fairly tense myself.”<sup>41</sup> *Think* (1993) carries forward the qualities of anxiety, constraint and control that defined *Green Light Corridor*. One television set is stacked on top of another. On each monitor, a loop of Nauman’s face, tightly framed, shows him bouncing up and down. The top television monitor is turned upsidedown, creating the illusion that with each bounce Nauman’s head repeatedly merges and splits. The loops are doubled, but not synchronized. Only the top of his head comes into full view, with the occasional view of his mouth ostensibly screaming the soundtrack. “THINK! THINK! THINK!” is punctuated by grating, abrasive sounds such as clashing cymbals. It is impossible to obey Nauman’s demand to participate, given that the repetitiveness and volume produces the opposite effect; making it impossible, indeed, to think.

This division between subject and image creates within Graham’s audience a phenomenological awareness of the presence of temporality, rather than a vertiginous immersion into an environment made up of actual and virtual elements such as the experience described by Johann Eberhard in the nineteenth century. Like Morris’,

---

<sup>40</sup> Joan Simon, ed. *Bruce Nauman* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1994), 245.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce Nauman, interview by Michele De Angelus. “Interview with Bruce Nauman, May 27 and 30, 1980” in *Please Pay Attention, Please: Bruce Nauman’s Words*, ed. Janet Kraynak (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 258–59.



McCall's, Campus' and Graham's work, in Nauman's earlier installations "the viewer is directly, physically engaged—'performing' rather than 'viewing' the object—and indeed the completion of the object is contingent upon such interactions." Here, the stress is placed on prodding the audience into both an active engagement with the material of the work and an awareness of their sensory engagement with it. All of these works privilege detachment over involvement, autonomy over immersion, "reality" over illusion. This notion of autonomy goes beyond the detachment of the individual from the environment, but also between art and the rest of cultural production: in the case of projected video environments, art and media culture were to become established as two terms in a dialectical relationship.

#### **4.3 The Anti-Entertainment Polemics**

Kraynak uses Nauman's technocratic critiques to dismiss more recent installations such as Jorge Pardo's *Pier* (1997) and Charles Long's *Bubble Gum Station* (1995) for being entertaining rather than difficult. She writes:

in these (and other) examples the once radical premises and potentially destabilizing effects of participation are transmogrified into a user-friendly doctrine of artistic viewing. The artist is no longer producer but caretaker and nurturer who provides sustenance, entertainment, and other pleasures for an audience that can enjoy such spoils without having to purchase anything....<sup>42</sup>

Pleasure through entertainment is integral to the economic relationship of this gift economy, itself a mask Kraynak argues for "forced participation." Pardo's *Pier*—as its title suggests—is a pier constructed out of imported California redwood that juts out onto Lake Aasee, at whose edge sits Münster, Germany. Perched on its end is a

---

<sup>42</sup> Kraynak: 30.

hexagonal pavilion (complete with cigarette machine), inside which the viewer is invited to contemplate both the lake and the city. Commissioned as a temporary installation for the 1997 Sculptor Project in Münster, it has since become a permanent fixture. Charles Long's *Bubble Gum Station* is the centerpiece of a series of nine collaborative sculpture installations featuring the music of the British pop band, Stereolab. It consists of three stools, three headsets, a table, sculpting tools, and a mountain of pink artificial clay. With these elements, the installation extends a tacit invitation to the museum visitor to sit on the stool, put on the headphones through which Stereolab plays continuously, and sculpt the pink mound into new forms. For Kraynak,

far from operating *outside* the dominant [late capitalist] system, this “gift economy” (as...“participation”) is structurally immanent to that system....[Pardo and Long] both propose a reading of *participation as obligation*: a tacit form of control in which reciprocity is all but guaranteed and desires and will are exploited, becoming, in effect, forms of submission—or dependency. Technocratic society, we shall see, is precisely built upon this dynamic: a dialectic of participation and control.<sup>43</sup>

Left intact in Kraynak's position are the central arguments of 1960s modernism: that audience actions determine meaning production, and art and mass culture maintain a dialectical relationship. Moreover art must be difficult, because mass culture is entertaining.

In the 2003 *October* roundtable on the projected image in contemporary art, McCall opposes the experience of watching a video or film, in which the body becomes “rooted to the spot,” to the experience of sculpture or architectural space,

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 30–31.

where “you must walk, measuring what you see with your eyes and your physical body.”<sup>44</sup> He uses an installation by Rosemarie Trockel to illustrate the irreconcilability of these two experiences. The installation’s title, *Spleen* (2000-2002)—defined as “the seat of emotions and passions”—serves as the generative concept for a cycle of short videos that together narrate fragments of the story of a fictional character, a woman named Manu. In the configuration at Dia: Chelsea that McCall describes, Trockel installed a series of five freestanding walls throughout the gallery. Each wall is covered on one side with interlocking, mobile aluminum plates, and on the obverse continuous loops of the five-part video cycle are projected. Each sequence is shot in a different style, and each shows a different event: a press conference, a party, and a theater performance. As McCall observed, the riddle of the work lies in the relationships between the five video sequences. The visitor needed to walk from one to the other, stop, consider, and compare then with each other. The trouble for McCall lay in the audience’s fragmented reception of the installation’s sculptural elements and video sequences.

For most of this time, you are rooted to the spot, absorbed, as you watch and listen to a clip, before you move on to seek out the next. During this entire process, you barely notice the free-standing planes of aluminum plates, which you are invited to consider as part of a single, integrated installation. Physically, these are large, sculptural surfaces. But while you study the clips, they seem gratuitous.<sup>45</sup>

Following this argument, most film and video, because it describes an “elsewhere,” or an illusionistic space, cannot produce a phenomenological experience on par with the

---

<sup>44</sup> Baker et al, 76.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

interrelationship between “present” elements such as space, the object and the audience’s body, as Dan Graham described. I would argue, rather, that McCall chose an example that failed not because the experience of illusionistic film and video is incommensurate with phenomenology, but because it failed to provide an immersive experience.

I began this chapter with an example of a contemporary projected video environment by an artist, Nauman, who is lauded for making “good” audience-centered environments. More generally, however, contemporary projected video environments have been criticized by critics and theoreticians for their “bad” relationship to their audiences. The break between virtuality and immersion begins in the late 1960s, as texts by Morris, Smith, Sitney, Gidal and Graham that I cited earlier attest. It reemerges in the critical response to contemporary projected video environments in the mid- to late-1990s. Principles established in the 1960s and the 1970s are used to critique, and then dismiss the immersion into pleasure and media culture generated by the confusion between the virtual and the phenomenological in projected video environments.

That projected video environments resulted in an all-enveloping experience was accepted early on. In 1996 Barbara London (the curator of film and video at the Museum of Modern Art) wrote:

By releasing the image from a single screen and embedding it in an environment, artists have extended their installations in time and space. The works envelop the viewer, who moves around and through them. Engulfed by

the assemblage of temporal parts, the process of looking is as much about the physical experience as the composite memories that live on in the mind.<sup>46</sup>

Since the 1970s Bill Viola has used video to create immersive environments that envelop the audience in image and sound, providing an avenue to both self-knowledge and a spiritual experience.<sup>47</sup> An example singled out for criticism by Foster is *Stations* (1994). The installation consists of five video projections arranged along a wall in a darkened room, five granite slabs that form a right angle to each of the projections on the gallery floor, and a sound track. The projections show lifesize images of five naked people suspended upside-down in the water: a boy, an old man,

---

<sup>46</sup> Barbara London, "Video Spaces," *Performing Arts Journals* 18, no. 3 (September 1996): 14.

<sup>47</sup> Other notable examples include the Swiss artist Pippilotti Rist's *Ever Is Over All*, and *Stasi City* by the British twins Jane and Louise Wilson (both 1997). *Ever Is Over All* envelops viewers in two slow-motion videos that are haphazardly projected on two adjacent walls, forming a right angle. A haunting melody both lures the visitor to the installation from elsewhere in the museum, and guides the narrative. On one screen a roving camera uncertainly focuses on a field of red flowers swaying in a lush, sun-dappled meadow. The hypnotic lull created in this projection complements the narrative taking place in the projection to its left. Filmed in medium- and long-shot, an attractive woman dressed in sparkling ruby slippers and a pretty blue dress skips down a neat car-lined street in a small European town. Carried a long-stemmed tropical flower, she seems to have stepped out of a scene from *The Sound of Music*. The multiple illusions that this scene projects are violently disrupted when the woman raises her flower and smashes in the passenger-side window of a parked car. Unruffled, the soundtrack continues as our interpretation of her glee shifts from innocence to anarchic pleasure. As the (now relabeled) vandal continues down her path of mayhem and property destruction, a police officer approaches. Our expectations are further destabilized when the officer smiles approvingly and offers a friendly salute as she passes the pretty vandal. The Wilson sisters' installation *Stasi City* consists of four projections onto four walls in a cubical room. The projections show documentary sequences of the abandoned headquarters of the defunct East German secret police—unofficially called *Stasi City*—a few years after Germany's reunification. The work's success stems from the vertiginous quality of its editing. Plunging its audience into dreamlike scenes redolent of East Germany's nightmarish past, the four-channel video installation projects a vertiginous juxtaposition of lateral and vertical shifts. The camera takes the installation's visitors up and down dumbwaiters, through labyrinths of abandoned corridors, and past doors that open onto interrogation rooms, surveillance rooms and record rooms. The physical plant both offers a mute testimony to the power and terror of the Stasi regime, and the completeness and suddenness of its downfall. The equipment lies abandoned under a thick layer of dust. Documents spill onto the floor. The paint is peeling. A soundtrack of industrial and electronic noise accompanies these sequences: clangs, buzzes, and clicks that could have been emitted by the equipment used by the building's former occupants. Together the soundtrack, the camera work and the placement of the audience in the center of the museum room performs the subtle psychology of a space that opens a window onto the power relations produced by the surveillance and paranoia that characterized East Germany's Cold War experience.

a 30-something man and woman, and another, very pregnant woman. The projections are reflected in the polished slabs of granite, merging the exhibition space with the screen space. The room is filled with amplified sounds produced by the bodies drifting and bobbing underwater: long trills of gurgles race around the gallery, interrupted by sloshes and the occasional splash. One of the figures' heads leaves the projection's frame, creating concentric rings in the water as she surfaces (at the bottom of the projection) for air. Occasionally a figure drifts offscreen, leaving its projection's narrow rectangles blank, further plunging the exhibition space into darkness. An eruption of churning, bubbling water interrupts the soundtrack's somnolent trills, as a figure plunges up from the floor and into the water, and the video's loop begins again.

The Museum of Modern Art website describes *Stations* as “a meditation on the continual cycles of life, death, and rebirth.”<sup>48</sup> In a first-person narrative posted online, an audience member, Philippe Bessière, described his experience inside the work after visiting it at the American Center in Paris in 1994:

Simultaneously, the onscreen bodies and I produce a communal experience of immersion and damnation inside a threatening and uncomfortable universe: I, by penetrating this darkened room; they, in their immersion into troubled waters. The submerged, immobilized, stagnant bodies twist slowly in the water current, seemingly weightless, as if delivered to the whim of the all-powerful water, dying within, perhaps already dead, like animal corpses preserved in formaldehyde. The flickering video screen reinforces this impression of agony and heavy calm: it makes the fingers twitch like a hanged man's before the moment of death; like a thrashing fish jerked out of its element. The slowed-down sound emphasizes the morbid quality of the

---

<sup>48</sup> MoMA.org | The Collection | Bill Viola, *Stations* (1994), [http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A7898&page\\_number=3&template\\_id=1&sort\\_order=1](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A7898&page_number=3&template_id=1&sort_order=1) (accessed June 10, 2008).

installation: breaths, shudders, lapping water, weak and continuous, modulated sadness.<sup>49</sup>

Like the nineteenth-century panorama critic Johann Eberhard, Bessière describes his experience inside Viola's immersive environment using adjectives usually reserved for physical impairment. Both descriptions bear out Grau's linking together of immersion and the erosion of emotional distance. Eberhard reeled and lurched between reality and nightmares. Bessière, for his part, finds himself drifting toward death, in an account that stresses the seductive, irresistible dreamlike nature of the experience, notwithstanding his characterizations of the universe he shared with the onscreen bodies as "threatening" and "uncomfortable." Eberhard also describes a dream, but it is a nightmare from which he is straining to wake up.

In an interview with Marquard Smith, Hal Foster defines autonomy as a "diacritical term [that] like any other, [is] defined in relation to its opposite, that is [in this case], to subjection."<sup>50</sup> The art object is defined by its autonomy in relation to "media culture." Thus, for Foster autonomy is especially urgent right now, in that it distinguishes art from the distractive conditions produced by "our media/web world." "And this concern has led me to rethink my own take on some art after Minimalism –

---

<sup>49</sup> "Nous faisons, les corps sur les écrans et moi, une expérience commune et simultanée d'immersion et de perte dans des univers menaçants et inconfortables: moi en pénétrant dans cette salle obscure, eux en étant plongés en "eaux troubles". Ces corps immergés, immobiles, stagnants et tournoyants lentement sur eux-mêmes au gré des courants d'eau, semblent en apesanteur, comme livrés à la volonté toute-puissante de l'eau, agonisants dans son sein, peut-être même déjà morts comme ces animaux que l'on conserve dans du formol. Les vacillements de la trame vidéo renforcent cette impression d'agonie et de calme pesant: ils font trembler leurs doigts un peu comme ceux d'un pendu avant le trépas ou comme les frémissements désespérés d'un poisson sorti de son élément. Les sons ralentis accentuent l'effet morbide de l'installation: souffles, frémissements, clapotis, faibles et continus, à peine modulés." My translation. Philippe Bessière, "BILL VIOLA, *Stations* 1994" <http://www.lensemblevide.com/viola.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes* (London: Verso, 2002): 102.

to think about how it might participate, knowingly or not, in this distractive condition.”<sup>51</sup> Foster dismissed immersive spaces—a state he considers to be the next step down from immersion—such as Viola’s projected video environment as “faux-phenomenological” works that “want to overwhelm bodies and space, to produce a kind of techno-sublime. Today this seems to be the desired effect of much art,” he continued, “And people love it, of course, in large part because it aestheticizes, or rather artifies, an ‘experience’ already familiar to them...”<sup>52</sup> Foster rejects these “faux-phenomenological” works in part because their success lies in the repetition of an experience already familiar to people through “the intensities produced by media culture at large.” Television in and outside the home, video games, the internet and its ubiquitous influence on everyday life have been added to the virtual sites described by Moholy-Nagy—billboards, news tickers, a fairground midway as well as Hollywood movies. Foster argues instead for a dialectical relationship between art (autonomy) and media (immersion). “For the most part, such art is happily involved with an image space that goes beyond the distractive to the immersive.”

While Foster refers to the expanded field of media and the expanded field of art in his 2004 interview, art critics, historians and artists from the left blame the introduction of “cinema” into the gallery for a broader shift away from a politically and ideologically progressive past. The underlying logic for this backlash is grounded in the dialectic of autonomy versus immersion laid out by Foster in the interview, and

---

<sup>51</sup> Hal Foster and Marquard Smith: “Polemics, Postmodernism, Immersion, Militarized Space,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 3 (2004): 326.

<sup>52</sup> Foster and Smith, 327.



the political promise autonomy holds out for so many critics. Cinema as well as television emerges as a bad other throughout this discourse. It is used as the foil in the backlash I summarized in chapter Three from conservative art critics such as Peter Schjeldahl.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Roberta Smith observed a disparaging joke circulating at the time of the 2002 Whitney Biennial that it be renamed the “Whitney Biennial Film Festival.” Ann M. Wagner used television as the bad other of video when she quoted Gary Hall’s reference to video as the “non-site of t.v.” As the “broken piece” of this “absent whole,” Wagner argues that pleasure and entertainment produced by contemporary projected video environments spells the death of its critical dimension.<sup>54</sup> The separation of the viewer’s experience from her or his body is one of the two main arguments that surfaces. Earlier environments were seen to offer the audience member a degree of interactivity, “even if the interaction afforded is the arguably passive one of inserting one’s body within a media.”<sup>55</sup> For David Joselit wall projections in the 1990s result in a move away from video’s radical potential as a medium and toward mere entertainment when it “reintroduces a more conventionally theatrical mode of spectatorship in which the audience remains outside the media feedback loop rather than participating as actors within it.”<sup>56</sup> He collapses the concern over the absent body with the introduction of mass media into the art context when asserting that “The major consequence of projection’s shift in spectatorship lies in its weaker acknowledgement that the video apparatus (including its commercial

---

<sup>53</sup> See pages 175–182.

<sup>54</sup> Ann M. Wagner, “Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence,” *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 80.

<sup>55</sup> David Joselit, “Inside the Light Cube,” *Artforum* 42, no. 7 (March 2004): 154.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

manifestation as television) is a machine for reproducing social relations.”<sup>57</sup> As Karen Beckman writes, “Haunting these statements, of course, is the specter of the art museum as cinema, a symptom of the growing fear that in the age of advanced capitalism, art galleries will offer only entertainment, helping to foreclose the possibility of nonconsumptive modes of looking.”<sup>58</sup> The introduction of video into the museum, Beckmann points out, is seen as a symptom of a broader shift away from a reformist critique and toward the amnesia of pleasure.<sup>59</sup> And as Katie Mondloch argues, “Indeed, many critics have pointed to a ‘filmic turn’ in recent artistic production, some going so far as to portray this as a crisis for art criticism and history.”<sup>60</sup> These views referred to by Beckman and Mondloch on the regressive relationship between audience and projected video environments underpin a roundtable on image and sound installation that was published in the spring 2003 issue of *October*. Chrissie Iles (a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art) blames the failure to include space on contemporary projected video environments’ postmodern conceptual structure.<sup>61</sup> For Foster and McCall, the ramifications of the move from modern to postmodern spill over into broader political consequences. Foster argues that these consequences are rooted in the new projected video environments’ relationship to virtuality:

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>58</sup> Karen Beckman, “When Video Does Foster Care: Pepón Osorio’s *Trials and Turbulence*,” *Grey Room* 19 (Spring 2005): 82.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>60</sup> Katie Mondloch, “Be Here (and There) Now: The Spatial Dynamics of Screen-Reliant Installation Art,” *Art Journal* 66 no. 3 (Fall 2007): 21.

<sup>61</sup> Chrissie Iles, in George Baker, et al., “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art,” *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 75.

When you say that film now is related to painting, I wouldn't say painting so much as "pictorialism." There's a rampant pictorialism, which is also a rampant virtualism, that the sculptural and spatial interests of your generation, Anthony [McCall] wanted to challenge, or at least to probe. The pictorialism of projected images today often doesn't seem to care much about the actual space. Sometimes it doesn't matter when you walk in, or even whether you do. This is beyond embodiment. It's habituating us to a kind of post-subjectivity.<sup>62</sup>

By "post-subjectivity," Foster could also be referring to Jean Baudrillard's "simulation," where "the real" is created through conceptual models that have no connection or origin in actual reality. Images (simulations) and signs (simulacra) become the determinants driving perceptions of the real.<sup>63</sup> Boundaries between the simulacra and reality implode, creating a world of "hyperreality" where distinctions between real and unreal are blurred. The culture industry blurs the lines between facts and information, between information and entertainment, between entertainment and politics. Because simulations and simulacra ultimately have no referents, a process of cultural entropy leads to the collapse of all boundaries between meaning, the media, and the social, resulting in no distinction between classes, political parties, cultural forms, the media, and the real.<sup>64</sup> Simulation and simulacra *become* the real, producing an undifferentiated flow of images and signs. In other words, for Foster, when 'pictorialist' video projections sever the relationship between the moving image, space and the body then it joins the postmodern flux, and prevents the subject

---

<sup>62</sup> Hal Foster, in George Baker et al.: 75.

<sup>63</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 1–42.

<sup>64</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006) 79–86.

from potentially rejoining, or reconnecting with a meaningful political experience through his or her body.

For George Baker, the engagement with pictorialism by contemporary artists—or as he puts it, virtualization—also describes a split between the phenomenological and the virtual: “some artists engaging with virtualization make it so excessive that we in fact enter into a new dynamic.”<sup>65</sup> However, Baker’s perspective on these new works is not as unilaterally hostile as McCall’s or Foster’s. In the roundtable, he describes a renewed attempt to engage with the utopian possibilities inherent to the form of projected video environments, just as artists from the previous generation set out to activate the body as an agent through the tools of mass media, or television and cinema:

But I think that this engagement with virtualization can also be a utopian condition for contemporary artists, as opposed to the utopias of the previous generation around phenomenology. Artists from the French context...are thinking of fictionalized scenarios, or virtualized scenarios, as a reengagement with utopia—with reconstructing social relations, imagining difference, constructing impossible scenarios—and are not dealing with physical limitations at all. Virtualization here is a potential source of utopian ambitions that one wants to reconnect to now in the wake of postmodernism, in a sense.<sup>66</sup>

For Baker, artists like Pierre Huyghe or Stan Douglas deal not so much with a “critique of representation,” as with “a very concerted project to bring [fictional or mass-cultural] constructs into the realm of the real, to bring fiction into reality as a

---

<sup>65</sup> See chapter 3 for Baker’s response to one such installation, Douglas Gordon’s *Through a Looking Glass* (1999).

<sup>66</sup> Baker et al, “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art,” *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 77.

utopian model.”<sup>67</sup> Just as the avant-garde saw portable video as an opportunity to invade mass media and remake network television, Baker sees a resurgence of utopia in projected video environments that depends on mass media as the bad other, whose tools can be turned against it. For Foster, any attempt to theorize utopia using projected video environments is short-circuited by the impossibility of operating outside of mass media and its controlling conglomerates. For Baker, the downside to this most recent utopian formulation is the uncertainty regarding its ultimate outcome, or “product:” does it form a break, or a perceptible difference from mass media spaces, or can it simply be another event that remains submerged in late capitalism?<sup>68</sup>

These positions have not gone unchallenged. In his interview with Smith, Foster recounted a question on immersion from an audience member at a talk he gave.

Essentially I agree with you: this expanded field of art has hooked up with an expanded field of media, but to pull back from it as you do under the cover of terms like ‘culture industry’ and ‘spectacle’ isn’t satisfactory anymore; that response’s too easy, its judgment too automatic. Can’t you think of other ways to consider this mediated illusion, this immersive experience, if indeed, as you suggest, it is a principal experience that the culture gives us today?<sup>69</sup>

Foster worked through his reply in the interview with Smith.

That question...has stuck with me, and I’m working on a response now....Is there another side to this culture of immersive experience? Might there be a cultural politics that doesn’t leave it to our masters to control every aspect of these terms? Of course this immersion is much more total in its effects than distraction faced by Benjamin and Kracauer, and both terms seem completely other to critical consciousness, and so we often fall back on the model of the

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>68</sup> A similar uncertainty lead critics to either dismiss or ignore Paul Pfeiffer’s *Orpheus Descending* (2001). See chapter 2.

<sup>69</sup> Foster and Smith: 327.

autonomous subject as a crutch. But there are other ways to address the problem.<sup>70</sup>

Challenged to think beyond the dialectic of autonomy and immersion, Foster proposes a “good” immersive experience, a passage through Richard Serra’s *Torqued Ellipses* that is based, in the end, on critical awareness, itself a measure of autonomy: “With Serra you’re made reflexive in your immersion; you’re not virtually obliterated by the experience.” Returning to the “bad” immersive experiences, he refines its characteristics as follows:

With the world of [James] Turrell and Viola...you’re somehow lost in relation to your body, and you stumble not only into the work but through it as well. It’s an effect, beyond distraction, of disorientation, of being lost in space.

Foster’s argument against immersion, in the final analysis, is grounded in the same paradigm as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s abhorrence of mimesis, which they describe as a “...trend which is deep-rooted in living beings, and whose elimination is a sign of all development: the trend to lose oneself in the environment instead of playing an active role in it; the tendency to let oneself go and sink back into nature.”<sup>71</sup> Rather than continuing to struggle within the terms originally put forward by Minimalist artists and Structuralist filmmakers, I want to propose another way to, in the words of Foster’s questioner, “consider this mediated illusion, this immersive experience.” As Beckman observed in her essay on the video installation of Pepón Osorio:

...we need to find ways of critiquing those works that seem to sustain or encourage passive and uncritical spectatorship without reductively invoking

---

<sup>70</sup> Foster and Smith: 328.

<sup>71</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Translated by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1997), 227.

narrative cinema and its usual exhibition modes as a negative foil against which all “progressive” noncommercial film and video practices can be measured. Such binary oppositions of the reception of cinema and video art...prevent us from inventing and recognizing the alternative possibilities of commercial culture.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed.

#### **4.4 Sense as Carnal Matter, Sense as Conscious Meaning**

As I observed at the beginning of this chapter, both the virtual and the phenomenological were central to the reception of Nauman’s installation, as its audience members mapped both Nauman’s studio and the museum. Furthermore, when they were dancing, surveilling, or sliding through the space, I contend that they collapsed the phenomenological and the virtual. Other responses to contemporary projected video environments focus on the way in which they integrate the body with the traditional cinematic apparatus. Boris Groys observed that video installations introduced night into the museum.<sup>73</sup> The curator Lynne Cooke argued that the black box freed the spectator from the restraints of traditional cinema when it required the spectator to determine his or her own vantage points, requiring a consciousness that would prevent he or she from becoming “totally immersed, incarnate viewers” that passively experience cinema. In a catalog essay Iles calls cinema a cocoon in which individual bodies are fixed, hypnotized by simulations of reality, a model that is broken with the introduction of projected video environments into the museum. The separation of the body from the environment or its integration therein is consistently

---

<sup>72</sup> Beckman, 83.

<sup>73</sup> See chapter 3.

seen to be pivotal to the political or ideological value of the installation. In defense of moviegoing, Mark Nash proposed that rather than equating watching a movie with passivity, and entering a projected video environment with activity, that we look at going to the movies in Puerto Rico, Lagos or Mumbai, which produces a very different, call-and-response approach to spectatorship.<sup>74</sup> While these responses carry forward the idea of the movement of the body through space theorized by Morris and McCall, they also understand the virtual to be key to the formation of the experience.

When offered the possibility of moving around in the dark in the presence of multiple projected moving images, *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)*'s viewers mimicked what took place on screen. Given that the critical model proposed by the inheritors of Minimalism and Structuralist film falls short in their analysis of the immersive experience of projected video environments, I want to propose two alternate models that will address the connections between virtual and phenomenological, and will address the sense of strangeness and inability to detach that was abhorred by Foster, Adorno and Horkheimer. In his essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," Roger Caillois considers the phenomenon of darkness and the effect that this has on the subject's relationship to space. In the dark, a place becomes doubly strange: both unknown and obscured. Rather than simply an absence of light, Caillois argues that the dark takes on "something positive" that depersonalizes the subject through his or her assimilation to space. This in contrast to a well-lit environment, where space as a "positive entity" is eliminated by "the

---

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 3.



materiality of objects...” Darkness, on the other hand, is “‘filled,’ it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence the ego is *permeable* for darkness while it is not so for light.”<sup>75</sup> For Caillois, the psychological state arrived at through the dark’s breakdown of the distinction between the subject and the space surrounding him or her produces a psychological weakening, mirroring the absence of clarity between figure and ground. For example if, while walking down a country road in absolute darkness I put my hand in front of my face, I have no idea where my hand is in relation to my face. Furthermore, I can’t see the foot that I put down in front of me. The absence of light produces a degree of uncertainty as to where “I” leave off and “space” or “object” begins. I know neither “where” my foot or my hand is, nor “where” the road, or a bordering tree, or a rock looming up as a potential obstacle are. This breakdown of the distinction between self, space and other creates a vertiginous sense of uncertainty. Given that the projected image sheds enough light that—while erratic—is usually adequate to orient the incoming viewer in the “black box” of the movie theatre or the projected video installation, the visitor is usually not forced to move through absolute darkness. Nevertheless the absence of light relative to the passage from the preceding space into the theatre or the projected video installation’s interior gives rise to a distinct receptivity to the work. This relationship between space, object and the subject’s body is quite different from the one theorized by Foster and McCall.

---

<sup>75</sup> Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 28–29.

For Caillois, the porosity of the borders between subject and space in the dark parallels what mimicry achieves morphologically in certain animal species through their use of camouflage. He argues against the assumption that mimicry be considered an adaptive behavior. Rather, mimicry as camouflage is “dangerous excess” when it increases the threats an animal faces from its environment. On the basis of these increased threats, which he supports by citing two studies demonstrating birds’ failure to discriminate between insect and vegetable life based on coloration, Caillois denies the utility of camouflage. It is this failure of utility that leads him to postulate a psychical explanation for the development of camouflage. The psychical condition experienced by the insect, or “legendary psychasthenia,” is dangerous when it leaves the insect captivated by its environment.

If mimicry cannot be considered defensive then it must affect the insect’s psychical relation to space.

In short, from the moment when it can no longer be a process of defense, mimicry can be nothing else but this. Besides, there can be no doubt that the perception of space is a complex phenomenon: space is indissolubly perceived and represented. From this standpoint, it is a double dihedral changing at every moment in size and position: a dihedral of action whose horizontal plane is formed by the ground and the vertical plane by the man himself who walks and who, by this fact, carries the dihedral along with him; and a dihedral of representation determined by the same horizontal plane as the previous one (but represented and not perceived) intersected vertically at the distance where the object appears.<sup>76</sup>

Camouflage disrupts the insect’s ability to locate itself in space, preventing it from situating itself at the place where it is, as it is no longer distinguishable from that place. “It is with represented space that the drama becomes specific, since the living

---

<sup>76</sup> Caillois, 28.

creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself.” For Caillois, the presence of represented space has a deleterious effect. When the confusion between represented space and the organism’s sense of its place arises,

...the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses...He feels himself becoming space...He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar...All these expressions shed light on a single process: depersonalization by assimilation to space.<sup>77</sup>

The breakdown of the subject’s sense of self-awareness interrupts its capacity for distancing, thus rational thought. “All these expressions shed light on a single process: depersonalization by assimilation to space, i.e., what mimicry achieves morphologically in certain animal species.” He links this decline to mimicry’s one-way reversion to an ‘earlier’ state of life: in mimicry “life takes a step backwards,” toward death.<sup>78</sup> This explains the sensations of sickness, loss of awareness, and death described by Eberhard, Foster and Bessière.

Thus, mimesis is not simply an imitation, but a drawing near and yielding to its object of mimicry. Here the yielding inherent to mimesis is presented as a passive function that leads inexorably to a state approaching death: the self loses itself and sinks, and by sinking begins to break down, or to decompose like so much rotting organic matter back into the surrounding world. This reversion is also used to explain the catatonic postures often involved in mimicry; in these cases, the animal ‘reverts’ to death, acting out its death drive. This yielding is both an act of imitation and

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 28–29.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 30.

contact. In his 1905 discussion of the comic, Freud put forward the idea of “ideational mimetics,” in which the physical imitation of another dominates: “in ‘trying to understand’, therefore, in apperceiving this movement, I make a certain expenditure, and in this portion of the mental process I behave exactly as though I were putting myself in the place of the person I am observing.”<sup>79</sup>

Be they drifting through a haze of inattention or at full alert, vigilant for the slightest movement, through mimicry visitors to Dia: Chelsea became involved in Nauman’s work in such a way that breached the distance between the self and the surrounding space(s), conceivably turning a *there*, that is to say Nauman’s studio, into a *here*, or the museum in New York City. These spatial and temporal conditions created a web where here and there bleed into each other, resulting in a response that directly contradicts the split between physical movement and the reception of the moving image argued for by McCall and Foster. It also produces the opposite effect than the one desired by Graham, where the self was split by his installation into subject and object. Adorno and Horkheimer wrote that the elimination of mimesis is the “sign of all development.” Mimicry is both the condition and the action that links visitors to projected video environments such as *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance, John Cage)* and *Stations*. The entropy implicit in mimicry’s yielding resembles the “narcotic haze” observed in the audience of Nauman’s work by Kimmelman and Richards in their reviews in the *New York Times* and *Artforum*.

---

<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Freud and James Strachey. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York: Norton, 1989), 240.

While historically classified as a modernist, with *Mapping the Studio I* (*Fat Chance, John Cage*) Nauman also produces an indirect rebuttal to the polarities between phenomenology and virtuality established by the critics of projected video environments, one which is repeated in environments such as Viola's, as well as the panoramas from the nineteenth century, the streetscapes of the twentieth, and virtual works produced by artists working in kinetics, and Op art from the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, not only does the current response to immersion cut itself off from mass media through its dialectic of autonomy and immersion—and as I have argued in previous chapters this greatly reduces and minimizes the critical field—it also cuts itself off from art history.

As Vivian Sobchack also points out, the relationship between the audience's body and the movies they go to is not quite as incommensurate as these theorists, artists and curators would have us understand it to be. We “matter and mean,” she writes, “through processes and logics of sense-making that owe as much to our carnal existence as they do to our conscious thought.”<sup>80</sup> She argues, rather, for a moviegoing experience that is absorbed through *all* our senses on a regular basis, not just exceptionally.

Richard Dyer hints at the spectator's direct, bodily experience when invoking the apocryphal account of the theatrical audience recoiling in terror from the movie of an onrushing train filmed by the Lumière Bros. Summing this up as the quintessential movie experience for many, Dyer describes it as the “celebration of sensational

---

<sup>80</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh,” <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/fingers.html> (accessed December 10, 2008).

movement, that we respond to in *some still unclear sense* ‘as if real’ ...”<sup>81</sup> With the phrase “in some still unclear sense,” for Sobchack, Dyer confesses himself to be at a loss to explain its (the audience’s response) very existence. For Sobchack, what makes a physical reception of cinema’s visual (and aural) representations possible is not only expressed by Dyer as a continuing mystery, but it is further destabilized by his phrase “as if real,” in this way “...further plunging the reader into a *mise en abîme* of experiential undecidability.”<sup>82</sup> When Sobchack plumbs the depths of this *mise en abyme*, what emerges is an accounting of a *multisensory* experience of film that involves both the phenomenological and the virtual facets also found in the response to projected video environments. Rather than an absence of a multi-sensorial experience on the part of the spectator, Sobchack suggests, film theorists have refused to theorize bodies whose wanton and crude actions at the movies—screams, sweaty palms, bulging, damp or wet crotches, tears, clenched fists, accelerated heart-rates—involuntarily counter “the fine-grained sensibilities and intellectual discriminations” of these theorist’s critical reflections.<sup>83</sup>

The interaction between the on-screen action and the moviegoer’s body is a “circuit of sensory vibrations that links viewer to screen,” or a somersault<sup>84</sup> This “somersault” describes the ambivalence between the “as if real” location onscreen and “real” location in which the viewer’s body that is embedded in “a phenomenological structure grounded in the...reciprocity...of *sense* as, at once, a

---

<sup>81</sup> Richard Dyer, “Action!” *Sight and Sound* 4, no. 10 (October 1994): 7–10.

<sup>82</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh.” <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/fingers.html> (December 10, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

*carnal matter* and a *conscious meaning*..." Sobchack begins with her own multi-sensory experience of watching the movies, as well as descriptions from the popular press that are filled with tactile, olfactory and gustatory references to mainstream films. Describing a scene from *The Piano* (1994) in which Baines (the protagonist's lover, played by Harvey Keitel) reaches out and touches Ada's (played by Holly Hunter) flesh through a hole in her black woolen stocking, Sobchack writes that she felt:

...an 'immediate tactile shock when flesh first touches flesh in close-up.' Yet precisely *whose* flesh I felt is ambiguous...At that moment when Baines touches Ada's skin through her stocking, suddenly my skin is both mine and not my own: the 'immediate tactile shock' opens me to the general erotic mattering of flesh...Thus, even confronted with an "objective" shot, my fingers know and understand the meanings of this "seen" and this viewing situation and they are everywhere—not only in the touching, but also in the touched.<sup>85</sup>

Pivotal to this experience is Sobchack's uncertainty over *whose* flesh was being touched—hers, or the onscreen character's. The line being subject and object, touching or being touched, blurred to the point where it lost both meaning and distinction.

Sobchack insists that she is not speaking metaphorically of touching and being touched. Rather, the sensory experience of touching and being touched that she experienced through *The Piano* is a consequence of the non-exclusivity of on-screen and off-screen locations for the "cinesthetic subject." This commensurability and incommensurability, for Sobchack, is both made possible and finds its counterpart in language:

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

...just as the lived body in the film experience turns back reflexively on itself to sense and make sense of the flesh on the screen...so, too, do our linguistic descriptions of that experience turn back on themselves reflexively to convey the sense of that experience as literally physicalized...

Language that makes sense of the movie going experience through the use of multisensory descriptions abound. Jan de Bont's *Speed* (1994) is described as "Viscerally...a breath-taking trip," or "This white knuckle, edge-of-your-seat action opus is the real thing. A reviewer of John Lasseter's *Toy Story* (1995) wrote that "A Tyrannosaur rex doll is so glossy and tactile you feel you could reach out and stroke its hard, shiny head."<sup>86</sup> This structure of sense-making "is experienced as *both* real *and* 'as if' real."

Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sobchack describes the circulation of "sense" (using both definitions of the word) between the body and representation as a "relationship of commensurability and incommensurability that, in certain circumstances, manifests itself as an oscillating, ambivalent, and often ambiguous or 'undecideable' experience." In this way, the self as the body is both merged with and kept distinct from representations of elsewhere. Working from Paul Ricoeur's discussion of literal and metaphorical meaning in Wittgenstein's distinction between "seeing" and "seeing as,"—itself constructed as both the slippage from one to the other *and* the maintenance of the boundary between direct sensory experience and metaphors—Sobchack writes that:

...in the act of "making sense" of the movies, catachresis is to language as the chiasmus is to the lived body. Ambivalently subtending fusion and catachresis not only points to the "gap" between the figures of language and

---

<sup>86</sup> Both quoted in Sobchack.



literal lived-body experience but also reversibly, chiasmatically, “bridges” and “fills” it. As Ricoeur suggests...catachresis ‘designates the *non-verbal mediation* of the metaphorical statement.’<sup>87</sup>

Or to paraphrase Wittgenstein’s formulation, with the acknowledgment of the non-verbal mediation of the metaphor, which the prior experiences of vision, taste, hearing or smell are used by the subject to create its meaning. With this, semantics finds its limit and a phenomenology of imagination takes over. Most importantly, through this Sobchack bridges the schism “between the sensuous on the screen as the semantic property of cinematic objects and the semiotic effects of cinematic representation, or *off* the screen in the spectator’s fantasmatic psychic formation, and basic sensory reflexes.”<sup>88</sup> The virtual is never divided from the phenomenological.

#### **4.6 Irit Batsry: *Set* (2003)**

My final example of a projected video environment, Irit Batsry’s *Set*, is made up of a complex interplay of all the elements referred to in this chapter: the opposition between the virtual and the actual, the centrality of the audience’s physical participation, the fragmentation (in this case) of the cinematic apparatus, and an identification and merging with onscreen characters that is aided and abetted by the environment.

Using seven videos in both black and white and color, Batsry’s installation consisted of documentary footage of the making of a feature film *Madame Satã* (directed by Karim Ainouz, starring Lázaro Ramos as Madame Satã/Joao Francisco

---

<sup>87</sup> Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh.” <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/fingers.html> (accessed December 10, 2003).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

dos Santos). The installation's configuration intercuts the audience into the actors and the crew, situating it somewhere between the fiction of cinematic space and the reality behind its construction. Batsry exhibited behind-the-scenes-footage as three sets of diptychs within in the installation space. *Make: Measure 1* and *Make: Measure 2* show the actor Lázaro Ramos being made up for his role as Madame Satã, and having his distance from the camera measured for a shot. The second diptych juxtaposed *Setup*, or a video projection that shows scenes of technical aspects of filmmaking, such as blocking, lighting, and shooting, with *Light*, depicting effects of light and shadow. *Reflect*, the third dyptich, consisted of imagery from the video monitor used by the director, actors, and crew to review the day's work. On the south side of the Museum's bridge a final video, *Make: Measure* was shown

The videotapes documented the set of the film, *Madame Satã*. The feature film *Madame Satã* doesn't set out to provide an accurate biography of the historical Francisco, who in 1900 was born to slaves in North Brazil and sold by his mother at seven. Rather, it narrates his story through a series of romanticized vignettes that come together to form a type, rather than a nuanced portrait. It is 1932; we are in the impoverished bohemian neighborhood of Lapa in Rio de Janeiro; a motley underclass made up of pimps and prostitutes, thieves and misfits calls this slum their home. In this setting, a former slave, a black, homosexual criminal chooses to reinvent himself anew, with a persona pulled together from the gauze of a sequin-encrusted Hollywood dream: Francesco's stage name, Madame Satã, payed homage to Cecil B. DeMille's 1930 film *Madame Satan*. His stage alter-egos, The Negress of the

Bulacoché, Jamacy the Queen of the Forest and St. Rita of the Coconut Tree, could have peopled a Jack Smith fever dream. The sequins and the gauze do not blunt, but rather frame and highlight his furious machismo. “I’m a queen by choice,” he retorts to a drunken homophobic heckler after bringing the house down with an over-the-top performance: “It doesn’t make me less of a man.”

Not only did Batsry’s video of *Set* bring the viewer into an ambiguous space located between the fiction of the cinema and the actuality of its creation, but the various components of its display dispersed throughout also reinforced this ambiguous space. Each diptych loop was shown in both small- and large-scale versions, producing a dialogue between the monumentality and immateriality of the projected image, and the intimacy of the television set. The multiple projectors in the installation were customized with image maskers and Plexiglas, and projected their images both onto a small board leaning against the wall and across the gallery, creating cones of light that sliced through the darkness. In this way the gallery and the audience formed additional strata in an already densely layered work that cross-cut between the “fact” and “fiction” of the production and reception of images: the facts of the Brazilian transvestite’s life, the fiction that lies in its being made into a film, the fact of Batsry’s footage that documented the behind-the-scenes process of making the film, and finally the material fact of the audiences’ bodies intersecting the streams of light that in turn cut across the darkness of the room, like McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone*. *Set*’s use of space through the intersection of projection and viewer describes a conscription of the “real” gallery space into the play between fact

and fiction, virtuality and phenomenology. Given the fragmentation of the film's narrative, apparatus and constituent components (projected light), when the visitor moved through the space, they too became a determinative element in the installation. The individual audience members' point of view drove the narrative, creating a kaleidoscopic effect that formed and reformed around them.

#### **4.6 Virtual Reality**

While the phenomenal and the virtual are at work in both, one important factor differentiates Nauman's and Batsry's work in particular, and projected video environments in general from popular film shown in the movie theatre: the integral nature of audience movement to the work's completion. The experience of the work is produced through the visitors' direct, physical engagement with it through mimicry of Nauman's onscreen cat and mouse game, or by moving around Batsry's exploded cinematic apparatus. In these contexts, the multi-sensory structure described by Sobchack is turned inside out, or externalized onto the physical and social structure of the projected image installation environment. In the "black box" of the video installation the carnal and conscious response described by both Sobchack and the popular press is performed or acted out by an audience otherwise required to sit in rows of fixed chairs. However, I am not interested in this movement for the reasons I summarized earlier—the way in which it distinguishes itself from "virtuality"—but rather for the way in which it moves Sobchack's somersault into "virtual reality." While there is no textual evidence that Nauman relies on the tropes of virtual reality

in *Mapping the Studio I*, or Batsry in *Set*, as their actions suggest, the visitors certainly do.

Oliver Grau identifies the following characteristics of computer-based virtual reality: a sense of control over the parameters of time and space, instantaneous access to other “spaces and communication worldwide via data networks, together...opens up a range of new options...where it is often impossible to distinguish between original and simulacrum.”<sup>89</sup> This creates the impression of a “living” environment whose agency both extends beyond the visitors and is under their control. The emergence of “virtual reality” dates back to Morton Heilig. A cinematographer active in the 1950s, he was inspired by short-lived curiosities such as Cinerama and 3D movies. Heilig wanted to create an experience for the spectator that would immerse them into an image as opposed to placing them in front of it, as well as incorporating all the senses, not just sight and hearing. A rollercoaster ride shown using Cinerama, he observed, would give the participant “the feeling that you were actually there, with the feeling of vertigo and other sensations. I immediately understood that this was a qualitative difference in the film experience. You were no longer apart from the film. Because of the size of the screen you were suddenly part of the experience.”<sup>90</sup> By expanding cinema to involve not only sight and sound, but also taste, touch, and smell, he envisioned the dissolution of the traditional fourth wall of film and theater, transporting the audience into an inhabitable, virtual world.<sup>91</sup> He called this cinema of

---

<sup>89</sup> Grau, 7.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Francis Hamit, *Virtual Reality and the Exploration of Cyberspace* (Carmel, Ind.: Sams Publications, 1993), 54–55.

<sup>91</sup> The parallels to Gene Youngblood’s expanded cinema are striking.

the future “experience theater.” In the late 1950s he developed a nickelodeon-style arcade machine, the Sensorama, which ushered participants into multi-sensory adventures in surrogate travel.<sup>92</sup> Heilig’s Experience Theater was a version of the Sensorama Simulator intended for a larger audience. Patented in 1969, its large, semi-spherical screen makes it possible to show three-dimensional motion pictures. Peripheral still images, directional sound, smells, forced air, temperature fluctuations and a body-tilting seat set out to provide the audience with a full-body immersion into the story’s illusion, or virtual reality. Scott Fisher, a developer of NASA’s Ames Virtual Environment Workstation built on Heilig’s vision, developing technologies that later resulted in the kind of helmeted user of virtual reality first envisioned by Heilig, and since then made iconic in examples from popular culture such as the 1982 Disney science fiction film starring Jeff Bridges, *Tron*.<sup>93</sup>

From virtual reality’s inception, the presence, absence or role of the body has been central to discussions about it in scholarship as well as the popular press. A *New York Times* review of Wii, an exercise program and a video game described it as upending the notion of what video games could be by moving beyond “the sunlight-deprived young men at gaming’s core.” A user described it as “like playing Nintendo,

---

<sup>92</sup> Worth noting is that the dioramas in the nineteenth century were popular for precisely this function.

<sup>93</sup> Bridge’s character’s (Kevin Flynn) video game ideas are stolen by his ambitious and unscrupulous coworker Ed Dillinger (David Warner). With help from his friends, Flynn tries to hack into the Master Control Program (MCP) to prove Dillinger’s guilt. The MCP is an artificial intelligence that started out as Dillinger’s chess program, and later develops ambitions to take over the company and then the Pentagon computer systems. Flynn is kidnapped into the digital world by the MCP, a feat made possible by experimental lasers that can digitize objects, causing them to reform inside the computer as software programs, before reappearing into the material world, intact. Inside the computer, Flynn and a number of other Programs are forced to compete in gladiator-style games that will result in their eventual elimination, and real world demise. Flynn joins forces with Tron, an honest safety program, to outmaneuver the MCP. After many plot twists and turns, the MCP is defeated, Flynn is sent back to the real world, with his reputation restored.

but with your body.”<sup>94</sup> The new media scholar Daniel Palmer writes that virtual reality also suggests a form of simulation that often involves multiple senses, or parts of the body.<sup>95</sup> Again, the emphasis is placed on either the separation from or merging between the body and electronic technology. Virtuality is conceived not in opposition to the real (a state which, in turn, is grounded in bodily experiences of the world), but as a potential that may be realized as many different actualities. Mark Hansen argues that cyberspace is anchored in the body, and the body—not high-tech computer graphics—makes it possible for a person to feel like he or she is really “moving” through virtual reality. Reciprocally, virtual experiences are seen to profoundly affect our understanding of what it means to live as embodied beings.<sup>96</sup>

This understanding of embodiment through virtual realities is reframed through the visceral responses of gamers playing computer games. Diane Carr’s reading of the game player’s body parallels the audience responses inside projected video environments that I and others have identified. Carr notes the intense correlation between the game player’s body and manipulated computer representation, observing that game players often respond by “flinching when their avatar bangs their head...[leaned] over with pseudo-centrifugal forces, or felt their

---

<sup>94</sup> Seth Schiesel, “Fitness for Every Body: O.K., Avatar, Work With Me,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/15/fashion/15fitness.html?scp=1&sq=fitness+for+every+body&st=nyt> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>95</sup> Daniel Palmer, “Walter Benjamin and the Virtual: Politics, Art, and Mediation in the Age of Global Culture,” *Transformations* no. 15 (November 2007), [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_15/article\\_11.shtml](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_15/article_11.shtml) (accessed January 14, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Mark B.N. Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006), x.

stomach lurch when their avatar plunges over a cliff.”<sup>97</sup> An avatar is a computer user’s representation of him or herself, or an object representing the embodiment of the user. The term avatar can also refer to the personality connected with the screen name of a user.

Given the role performed by avatars it is arguable that any uncanny resonance potentially generated while we watch a body move on film is amplified when, as players, we operate and navigate avatars. We use avatars as embodiments or vehicles, as our agents in the gameworld. The player hits a button; the avatar jumps, somersaults or flicks a switch.<sup>98</sup>

Carr refers to an essay by Lesley Stern that uses the Freudian concepts of the uncanny and the double to explore the carnal sensations generated by “bodies in motion on film, and the instants of recognition they generate.”<sup>99</sup> Relationships between the lived experience and representation are inextricably intertwined in these accounts.

Internet usage, Carr argues, has an even more consequential effect on this identification than film and other media because of the assumption that the user is part of the setting, and bodies elsewhere are accessible through the Internet. This more fluid relationship between the virtual and the actual provides the subject with the illusion of being present in a simulated world whose elsewhere could either be electronic, or physical. In an argument that predates Sochack’s recognition and strangeness that is called forth by the screened image of a body in motion that somersaults us, in Stern’s words, between the screen and ourselves. A more recent

---

<sup>97</sup> Diane Carr, “Play Dead: Genre and Affect in *Silent Hill* and *Planescape Torment*,” *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 3, no. 1 (May 2003), <http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/carr/> (accessed June 5, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Lesley Stern, “I Think, Sebastien, Therefore...I Somersault: Film and the Uncanny,” *Australian Humanities Review*, November 1997, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-November-1997/stern2.html> (accessed June 5, 2008).



form of virtual interaction is massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG).<sup>100</sup> Players control a character avatar within an online game world that continues even while an individual player stops playing. In it, players explore landscapes, overcome obstacles, set out on quests, build skills, and interact with non-player characters and other players. And most recently, *Second Life*, an Internet-based virtual world launched in 2003, broke through the public imagination.<sup>101</sup> Unlike MMORPGs, *Second Life* is not a game. A downloadable client program developed by Linden Research Inc. (commonly referred to as Linden Lab), the Second Life Viewer makes it possible for users (or Residents) to interact with each other through avatars. Residents can meet other Residents, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and create and trade virtual property and services. All of which form part of a “metaverse,” or a fictional virtual world.<sup>102</sup>

Some critics take the relationship between the screen and the user’s body even further. Brenda Laurel defines telepresence as:

...a medium that allows you to take your body with you into some other environment... you get to take some subset of your senses with you...And that

---

<sup>100</sup> Richard Garriott, the designer of Ultima Online (a massive multiplayer online role-playing game that put the genre on the map in 1997) is acknowledged to have come up with the term MMORPG. Ultima Online, <http://www.uoherald.com/news/> (accessed June 10, 2008)

<sup>101</sup> James Harkin, “Get a (second) life,” *Financial Times*, November 17, 2006 [http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news\\_id=fto111720060914365020](http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news_id=fto111720060914365020) (accessed May 11, 2008); Irene Sege, “Leading a double life,” *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 2006 [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2006/10/25/leading\\_a\\_double\\_life/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2006/10/25/leading_a_double_life/) (accessed May 11, 2008).

<sup>102</sup> First described in Neal Stephenson’s 1992 science fiction novel *Snow Crash*, in a metaverse humans, as avatars, interact with each other and software agents in a three-dimensional space that uses the metaphor of the real world. The word *metaverse* is a compound of the words “meta” and “universe.”

environment may be a computer-generated environment, it may be a camera-originated environment, or it may be a combination of the two.<sup>103</sup>

In Laurel's definition, telepresence encompasses two different situations: being "present" inside a camera- or computer-generated environment (or virtual reality) and being "present" in a real remote physical location via a live video image. Fisher does not distinguish between being "present" in a computer-generated or in a real remote physical location.<sup>104</sup> Working from Heilig's experience theater, Fisher defines "telepresence" as "a technology which would allow remotely situated operators to receive enough sensory feedback to feel like they are really at a remote location and are able to do different kinds of tasks."<sup>105</sup> Through its ability to manipulate physical reality from a distance in real time using an image, telepresence breaks from the other examples in that it becomes possible for a subject to control not just a simulation, but reality from a distance. For example, a space station can be repaired, underwater excavation can be carried out, and surgery can be performed from a distance. Lev Manovich reinforces this distinction by characterizing telepresence as "teleaction:" "the essence of telepresence is that it is anti-presence. I don't have to be physically

---

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Rebecca Coyle, "The Genesis of Virtual Reality," in *Future Visions: New Technologies of the Screen*, eds. Philip Hayward and Tana Wollen (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 162.

<sup>104</sup> In the late 1980s Scott Fisher's research into virtual reality, or the Virtual Environment Workstation (VIEW) project was carried out at the NASA-Ames Research Center in California. Adapting surround-sound headphones, a speech recognition microphone, and the "dataglove"—a wired glove worn by the user that makes it possible to grasp virtual objects in computer space—Fisher developed a virtual interface that produced full sensory immersion.

<sup>105</sup> Scott Fisher, "Visual Interface Environments," in *The Art of Human-Computer Interface Design*, ed. Brenda Laurel. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1990), 427.

present in a location to affect reality at this location. A better term would be teleaction. Acting over distance. In real time.”<sup>106</sup>

Currently, we are witnessing the transformation of the image into a computer-generated, virtual, and spatial entity that seemingly is capable of changing “autonomously” and representing a life-like, visual-sensory sphere. Interactive media are changing our perception and concept of the image in the direction of a space for multisensory, interactive experience with a temporal dimension.<sup>107</sup>

An analysis of projected video environments would do better to draw on these ideas, and these assumptions, than to a debate over whether or not the virtual and the phenomenological are commensurable or incommensurable.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

Once it is established that the virtual and the phenomenological are inextricably intertwined through sense and sense, as Sobchack points out in her corrective of film criticism, the split between the phenomenological and the virtual claimed by certain contingents of art criticism can no longer be argued for. Followers of minimalism raise the political danger of pictorialism as a mere additive to the society of the spectacle, resulting in disorientation and media intensification rather than critical reflection. This dismissal of mass media is something that I have observed in the multiple configurations of video and site over the course of this dissertation: broadcast television, expanded television, and now virtual reality. I would argue that these most recent dismissals continue the heuristic failures made following the earlier

---

<sup>106</sup> Lev Manovich, “To Lie and To Act: Potemkin's Villages, Cinema, and Telepresence,” <http://www.braintrustdv.com/essays/telepresence.html> (accessed June 5, 2008).

<sup>107</sup> Oliver Grau, “Introduction,” in *MediaArtHistories*, ed. Oliver Grau (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 7.

attempts to enter broadcast television by the avant-garde in the 1970s, and then in the more recent re-emergence of this dismissal in the spaces of expanded television.

Finally, the response produced by projected video environments that I identified earlier in this chapter questions art criticism, and the position of the individual art critic. Foster understands autonomy, or distance, as a constitutive element of reflection, politics and the experience of art. The experience of virtuality involves a sensory and emotional process that challenges the tradition of aesthetic distance, when it collapses the physical and affective distance between the audience and the work, undermining critical distance. The art itself necessitates a new type of reflective criticism, which goes beyond the traditional function of legitimation and judgment and places the body at the indeterminate centre of critical concerns. For Grau, “in certain seemingly *living* virtual environments, a fragile, central element of art comes under threat: the recipient’s act of distancing.”<sup>108</sup> By bringing in Cailliois, Sobchack, and pointing toward some of the literature on virtual reality, I argue, rather, for an analysis of the entropic response to these projected video environments that moves beyond the dialectic of autonomy and immersion, or distance and involvement. The term “immersion” tends to refer to work that not only requires the active involvement of the viewer, but also somehow overwhelms the senses. It is a spatial experience, in the sense of enveloping the spectator in a discrete and often panoramic zone. Registering the body’s affects, while dissolving the space of

---

<sup>108</sup> Oliver Grau, “Immersion and Interaction: From Circular Frescoes to Interactive Image Spaces,” *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*. Eds. Rudolf Frieling and Dieter Daniels (New York: SpringerWien, 2004), 304.

individual self-possession, enables an exploration of the uncertainty and instability of all perception and consciousness. In this way, such work blurs the normally clear distinctions between self and other, viewer and object. These environments offer the opportunity to restage these everyday experiences, as it is already being experienced in video gaming, as well as the interactions that take place online.

## References

- Aaron, Chloe. "The Video Underground." *Art in America* 54, no. 3 (May 1971): 74–79.
- Aitken, Doug, Interview by Thelma Golden. "Interview with Doug Aitken." *Interview* 37, no. 1 (2007): 244.
- Ang, Ien. *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Ang, Ien. *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 1985.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. "The Coming and Going of Images." *Leonardo* 3, No. 3, 2000: 167–168.
- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Edited by Samuel Lipman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Art:21. Paul Pfeiffer. Interview & Videos | PBS Erasure, Camouflage, & "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."  
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/pfeiffer/clip1.html> (accessed June 18, 2007).
- Art Gallery of Ontario. *Videoscape: An Exhibition of Video Art*. Toronto: Education and Extension, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1974. An exhibition catalog.
- Asher, Michael. "Excerpts of a description from Notebook 1/11/76 describing the first run through of a television broadcast delivered 1/18 as a work for the groupshow 'Via Los Angeles' at Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland (Oregon) 1/9/76–2/8/76." In *Video-Architecture-Television: Writing on Video and Video Works*, edited by Benjamin Buchloh, 56. Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and New York: The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1979.
- Baker, George et al., "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art." *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 71–96.
- Baker, Kenneth. "Keith Sonnier at the Modern." *Artforum*. 10, No. 2 (October 1971): 77–81.

- Basilico, Stefano. "Just Another Day on the Farm: *Orpheus Descending* Suggests That We're all Caged in Our Hellish Routines." *Time Out New York*, June 7-14, 2001, 56.
- Barzyk, Fred. "TV as Art as TV." *Print*, 26 (January 1972): 21.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Beckman, Karen. "When Video Does Foster Care: Pepón Osorio's *Trials and Turbulence*." *Grey Room* 19 (Spring 2005): 80-101.
- Beech, David. "Is Godard a Philistine?" In *I Said I Love. That is the Promise: The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard*, edited by Gareth James and Florian Zeyfang, 31-57. Berlin: oe + b books, 2003.
- Beech, David. "Video After Diderot." *Art Monthly*, no. 225 (April 1999): 7-10.
- Behne, Adolphe. "Art, Craft, Technology." In *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architectural Culture 1880-1920*, edited by Francesco Dal Co, 324-338. New York: Rizzoli, 1990.
- Belloli, Jay. "Preface." In *New Video and Performance Art in Detroit*. Works in Progress V, by The Detroit Institute of Arts, 4-5. Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1979. An exhibition catalog.
- Bellour, Raymond and Anne-Marie Duguet. "La Question Vidéo." *Communications*, no. 48 (1988): 56.
- Benjamin, Andrew and Peter Osborne, eds. *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 217-252. New York: Schocken Books, 1973.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century." In *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, 14-26. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995.

- Bergala, Alain, ed. *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma-Éditions de L'Étoile, 1985.
- Berkovitz, Joseph. "On Chance in Causal Loops," *Mind* 110, no. 437 (January 2001): 1–23.
- Bessière, Philippe. "BILL VIOLA, *Stations* 1994." <http://www.lensemblevide.com/viola.htm> (accessed June 10, 2008).
- Biesenbach, Klaus et al. *Doug Aitken: Sleepwalkers*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007.
- Birnbaum, Daniel. "That's the Only Now I Get: Space, Time and Experience in the Work of Doug Aitken." In *Doug Aitken*, 38–105. Daniel Birnbaum, Amanda Sharp and Jorg Heiser. New York: Phaidon Press, 2001.
- Block, René. "Square Map SoHo. Europe in SoHo. Alex—or the Spirit of SoHo." In *New York—Downtown Manhattan: SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film*, edited by René Block, Ursula Block, Kurt Thöricht, 6–104. Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976. An exhibition catalog.
- Boyle, Deirdre. "Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited." *Art Journal* 45, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 228–232.
- Bryson, Norman, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey. *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Buchloh, Benjamin. "From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Works." *Art Journal* 4, no. 45 (Fall 1985): 217–227.
- Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 16–32.
- Carey, James W. *Communications as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Carr, C. "Icon Remix: Paul Pfeiffer Sees the Art Historical Vista from the Bates Motel." *The Village Voice*, November 29–December 5, 2000. <http://www1.villagevoice.com/news/0047,162203,20193,1.html> (accessed June 18, 2008).
- Carr, Diane. "Play Dead: Genre and Affect in *Silent Hill* and *Planescape Torment*." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 3, no.



1 (May 2003). <http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/carr/> (accessed June 5, 2008).

Centre George Pompidou, Musée nationale d'art moderne, Paris; the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and the Centre pour l'image contemporaine Saint-Gervais, Geneva. "Chronological Landmarks: The 1960s." *New Media Encyclopedia*. <http://www.newmedia-arts.org/english/reperes-h/70.htm> (accessed February 27, 2003).

College of the Arts. *Interactive Sound and Visual Systems*. Edited by Charles Csuri. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970. An exhibition catalog.

Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994.

Cooke, Lynn. "B(e)aring Meaning." In *Marijke van Warmerdam: Single, Double Crossing*. Eindhoven, Van Abbemuseum, 1997. An exhibition catalog.

Cooke, Lynn. "Stan Douglas and Douglas Gordon: *Double Vision*," <http://www.diaart.org/exhibs/douglasgordon/double/essay.html> (accessed May 22, 2007).

Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as amended Subpart D—Corporation for Public Broadcasting Sec. 396. [47 U.S.C. 396]

Coyle, Rebecca. "The Genesis of Virtual Reality." In *Future Visions: New Technologies of the Screen*, edited by Philip Hayward and Tana Wollen, 148–165. London: British Film Institute, 1993.

Crimp, Douglas. *On the Museum's Ruins*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

Dal Co, Francesco, ed. *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architectural Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Rizzoli, 1990.

Daniels, Dieter. "Media → Art / Art → Media: Forerunners of Media Art in the First Half of the Twentieth Century." In *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*, edited by Rudolf Frieling and Dieter Daniels, 26–57. New York: SpringerWien, 2004.

Daniels, Dieter. "Television—Art or Anti-Art?—Conflict and Cooperation between the Avant-garde and the Mass Media in the 1960s and 1970s." In *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*, edited by Rudolf Frieling and Dieter Daniels, 58–99. New York: SpringerWien, 2004.

- Daniels, Dieter and Rudolf Frieling, eds. *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*. New York: SpringerWien, 2004.
- Davis, Douglas. *Art and the Future*. New York: Dutton, 1973.
- Davis, Douglas. "SoHo du Mal: Video, Film." in *New York, Downtown Manhattan, SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film*, edited by René Block, Ursula Block, Kurt Thöricht, 211–237. Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976. An exhibition catalog.
- Davis, Douglas. "Video Obscura." *Artforum*. 10, no. 8 (April 1972): 65–71.
- Davis, Douglas and Alison Simmons, eds. *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978.
- Day, James. "Visual Grammar as a Barrier to International Program Exchange." In "Television Programming: International Exchange Conference (1978)." Box: R1657 Series: 200R Record Group: A81. RAC, 4.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Three Questions on *Six Times Two*." In *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, translated by Martin Joughin, 37–45. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. Edited by Gil Anidjar. Translated by Samuel Weber. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Edited by Michael B. Naas. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- The Detroit Institute of Arts. *New Video and Performance Art in Detroit*. Works in Progress V. Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1979. An exhibition catalog.
- Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.
- Dia Art Foundation. Press Release "*Double Vision* Installation at Dia Center for the Arts February 11, 1999–June 13, 1999." February 11, 1999. <http://www.diachelsea.org/dia/press/douglasgordon.html> (accessed June 18, 2006)
- Dia Art Foundation. Press Release "Dia Art Foundation Invites Public to Streamside Day Celebration and to be Part of Pierre Huyghe's Film 'Streamside Day Follies.'" October 2, 2003. <http://www.diacenter.org/dia/press/huyghe.html> (accessed July 16, 2004).

- Diawara, Manthia. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Diawara, Manthia. "Sonimage in Mozambique." In *I Said I Love. That is the Promise: The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard*, edited by Gareth James and Florian Zeyfang, 93–123. Berlin: oe + b books, 2003.
- Douglas, Stan. *Inconsolable Memories: Stan Douglas*. Omaha, Nebraska: Joslyn Art Museum, 2005. An exhibition catalog.
- Douglas, Stan. "Diana Thater in Conversation with Stan Douglas." In Scott Watson, Diane Thater, Carol J. Clover, *Stan Douglas*, 8–29. London: Phaidon Press, 1998.
- Douglas, Stan. "In Conversation with Lynne Cooke, 1993." In Scott Watson, Diane Thater, Carol J. Clover, *Stan Douglas*, 116–121. London: Phaidon Press, 1998.
- Douglas, Stan. "Project for the RIAGG Zwolle" (1997). [http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/douglas/k\\_e.htm](http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/douglas/k_e.htm) (accessed May 30, 2007).
- Dyer, Richard. "Action!" *Sight and Sound* 4, no. 10 (October 1994): 7–10.
- Dziga Vertov Group. <http://newmedia-arts.net/english/glossaire/d.htm> (accessed June 5, 2008).
- Eccles, Tom. "Orpheus Descending: A Conversation." In *Orpheus Descending*, Paul Pfeiffer et al. New York: Public Art Fund, 2001, 6–23.
- Eco, Umberto. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Electronic Arts Intermix, "Global Groove" In *Artists' Video: An International Guide*. Edited by Lori Zippay. New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1991, 157.
- Enwezor, Okwui. "The Black Box," in *Documenta 11\_Platform 5: Exhibition, Catalogue*, edited by Okwui Enwezor et al., 42–55. Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002. An exhibition catalog.
- Enwezor, Okwui. *Stan Douglas: Le Detroit*. Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000.

- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. "Constituents of a Theory of the Media." In *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and Media*, edited by Michael Roloff, translated by Stuart Hood, 95–128. New York: Seabury Press, 1974.
- Esso Gallery, "Gerry Schum: *Identifications*, 1970." <http://www.essogallery.com/Schum.html> (accessed May 20, 2007)
- Ewen, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1982.
- Farrell, James J. *One Nation under Goods: Malls and the Seductions of American Shopping*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003.
- Finch, Charlie. "Turn 'Em Loose, Bruce." *ArtNet Magazine*. <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/cfinch/finch1-14-02.asp> (accessed May 21, 2006).
- Fisher, Scott. "Visual Interface Environments," in *The Art of Human-Computer Interface Design*, edited by Brenda Laurel, 423–438. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1990.
- Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Foster, Hal and Marquard Smith. "Polemics, Postmodernism, Immersion, Militarized Space." *Journal of Visual Culture* 3 (2004): 320–335.
- Foster, Hal. *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*. London: Verso, 2002.
- Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. 1989. *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. New York: Norton
- Fricke, Christiane. "1968/1969 | Black Gate Cologne: Otto Piene/Aldo Tambellini." In *40 Yearsvideoart.De—Part 1 Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 Until the Present*, edited by Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath, 98–103. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006.
- Frieling, Rudolf and Wulf Herzogenrath, eds. *40 yearsvideoart.de—Part 1 Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 Until the Present*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006.
- Furlong, Lucinda. "Raster Master." *Afterimage* 11, no. 8 (March 1984): 17–18.

- Gasché, Rodolphe. "Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'." In *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, edited by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, 183–204. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Gever, Martha. "Like TV: Barbara Kruger's *Twelve*." *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 6–19.
- Gever, Martha. "Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere." *Art Journal* 45, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 238–243.
- Gibian, Peter. "The Art of Being Off-Center: Shopping Center Spaces and Spectacles." *Tabloid* 5 (1981): 44–64.
- Gidal, Peter. "Theory & Definition of Structural/Materialist Film." *Studio International*. 190.978 (1975): 189–196.
- Gillette, Frank. *Aransas: Axis of Observation* (Houston, Texas: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1978). An exhibition catalog.
- Godard, Jean-Luc. "Les années video (1975 à 1980)." In *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* Édition établi par Alain Bergala. 377–441. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma-Éditions de L'Étoile, 1985.
- Godard, Jean-Luc. "Le dernier rêve d'un producteur." *Cahiers du cinema*, no. 300 (May 1979): 70–78.
- Godard, Jean-Luc. *Godard on Godard*. Edited by Jean Narboni and Tom Milne. Translated by Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd. New York: Viking Press, 1972.
- Godard, Jean-Luc. An online publication of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée nationale d'art moderne, Paris; the Museum Ludwig, Cologne and the Centre pour l'image contemporaine Saint-Gervais, Geneva. *New Media Encyclopedia* <http://www.newmedia-art.org/english/glossaire/d.htm> (accessed May 25, 2003).
- Golden, Thelma. "Interview with Doug Aitken." *Interview* 37, no. 1 (2007): 244.
- Graham, Dan. "Video in Relation to Architecture." In *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, 168–188. New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990.

- Grau, Oliver, ed. *MediaArtHistories*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2007.
- Grau, Oliver. *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*. Translated by Gloria Costance. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003.
- Grau, Oliver. "Immersion and Interaction: From Circular Frescoes to Interactive Image Spaces." *Media Art Net 1: Survey of Media Art*, eds. Rudolf Frieling and Dieter Daniels, 292–313. New York: SpringerWien, 2004.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." In *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 1: *Perceptions and Judgements 1939-1944*, edited by John O'Brian, 5–22. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986.
- Griffin, Tim. "Circular Logic: P.S. 1 Throws Viewers for a 'Loop.'" *Time Out New York*, January 17–24, 2002, 55.
- Griffin, Tim. "Cut to the Chase: Bruce Nauman Plays Cat and Mouse with the Viewer at the Dia Center." *Time Out New York*, January 24–31 2002, 47.
- Groys, Boris. "On the Aesthetics of Video Installations." In *Stan Douglas: Le Détroit*. Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 2001. An exhibition catalog.
- Grundmann, Heidi. "Television in Austria, 1955-1987." In *Revision: Art Programmes of European Television Stations*, edited by Dorinne Mignot, 8–15. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Art Museum, 1987.
- Guggenheim Collection—Artist—Douglas—Monodramas,  
[http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist\\_work\\_md\\_41A\\_4.html](http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_md_41A_4.html)  
 (accessed May 21, 2007).
- Habermas, Jürgen, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)." *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 49–55.
- Hall, Doug and Sally Jo Fifer, eds. *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*. New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, 128–38. London: Hutchinson, 1980.

- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse," CCCS stencilled occasional paper no. 7. Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973.
- Hall, Stuart, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Hutchinson, 1980.
- Hamit, Francis. *Virtual Reality and the Exploration of Cyberspace*. Carmel, Indiana: Sams Publications, 1993.
- Hanhardt, John G. "Dé-Collage/Collage," in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, 71–80. New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990.
- Hanhardt, John G. "Watching Television." In School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, *Watching Television: A Video Event*, 7–9. Urbana-Champaign: School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1983. An exhibition catalog.
- Hansen, Mark B.N. *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Hardwick, M. Jeffrey. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Harithas, James. "Foreword." In Frank Gillette, *Aransas: Axis of Observation*, 2–3. Houston, Texas: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1978. An exhibition catalog.
- Harkin, James. "Get a (Second) Life." *Financial Times*, November 17, 2006. [http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news\\_id=fto111720060914365020](http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news_id=fto111720060914365020) (accessed May 11, 2008).
- Harvey, Sylvia. *May '68 and Film Culture*. London: British Film Institute, 1978.
- Hayward, Philip and Tana Wollen, eds. *Future Visions: New Technologies of the Screen*. London: British Film Institute, 1993.
- "Hearings on Public Television, September 27, 1978. Testimony for Presentation to: The Subcommittee on Communications, House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee on the Provisions of HR 13015, The Communication Act of 1978." Foundation for Independent Video and Film [Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers], Conference: 1978–80 Box: R1863 Series: 200R Record Group: A82, RAC.

- Heath, Stephen. "Narrative Space," *Questions of Cinema (Theories of Representation and Difference)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 19–75.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Thing." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter, 165–182. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Hernandez, Erna to Christine Bacareza Balance. "Subject: Fwd: [maARTE] Paul Pfeiffer: *Orpheus Descending*." Posted on <http://pub16.ezboard.com/bmaarte> on Tuesday Apr 17, 2001 2:52 p.m.
- Herzogenrath, Wulf. "Video Art and Institutions: The First Fifteen Years." In *40 yearsvideoart.de—Part 1 Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 Until the Present*, edited by Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath, 20–33. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006.
- Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, Marc Silberman. "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture. Jurgen Habermas and His Critics." *New German Critique*, no. 16 (Winter, 1979): 89–118.
- Holston, James. "Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship." In *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, edited by Leonie Sandercock, 37–56. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Honneth, Axel, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe and Albrecht Wellmer. *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.
- Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. "The Museum in Disciplinary Society." In *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, edited by Susan M. Pearce, 61–72. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1997.
- Howard, Brice. Quoted in "National Center for Experiments in Television at KQED-TV 1967–1975 San Francisco, CA." *Video History Project* <http://www.experimental-tvcenter.org/history/groups/gtext.php?id=55> (accessed July 16, 2008).
- Hutchinson, Thomas. *Here is Television: Your Window to the World*. New York: Hastings House, 1946.
- Huxtable, Ada Louis. *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion*. New York: New Press, 1997.



- Huyghe, Pierre. Interview by George Baker. "An Interview with Pierre Huyghe." *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 80–106.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Iles, Chrissie. *Into the Light: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art, 1964-1977*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001. An exhibition catalog.
- Iles, Chrissie. "The Magic of the Unreal," *Marijke van Warmerdam*. Köln: Oktagon Verlag, 2000.
- Ireland, Barbara. "Cézanne's Provence." *The New York Times*, June 11, 2006. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/travel/11cezanne.html?scp=1&sq=%22barbara%20ireland%22%20cezanne&st=cse> (accessed June 15, 2006)
- James, Gareth and Florian Zeyfang. *I Said I Love. That is the Promise: The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard*. Berlin: oe + b books, 2003.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Johnson, Nicholas. *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.
- Joselit, David. *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.
- Joselit, David. "Projected Identities." *Art in America*. 79, no. 11 (Nov. 1991): 116–123.
- Joselit, David. "Commanding View." *Artforum*. 42, no. 5 (January 2004): 45.
- Joselit, David. "Inside the Light Cube." *Artforum*. 42, no. 7 (March 2004): 154–159.
- Joselit, David. "Terror and Form." *Artforum*. 43, no. 5 (January 2005): 45–46.
- Kahn, Douglas and Gregory Whitehead, eds. *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-garde*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

- Kaplan, E. Ann, ed. *Regarding Television*, The American Film Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 3. Frederick: University Publications of America, 1984.
- Keenan, Thomas. "Windows: Of Vulnerability." In *The Phantom Public Sphere*, edited by Bruce Robbins, 121–141. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993.
- Kimmelman, Michael. "Art in Review: Bruce Nauman—'Mapping the Studio I.'" *New York Times*, July 5, 2002, E35.
- Kirby, Michael. "The Uses of Film in the New Theatre." *The Tulane Drama Review* 11, no.1, (Autumn, 1966): 49–61.
- The Kitchen, "*Television Delivers People*."  
<http://www.thekitchen.org/MovieCatalog/Titles/TelevisionDelivers.html>  
 (accessed May 30, 2007)
- Report of interview between Howard Klein, Allan Kaprow and Nam June Paik, August 10, 1967 "SUNY—Stony Brook, Nam June (Video Artist), 1967–68." Box 423, Series 200R, Record Group 1.2. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.
- Klein, Howard to Chloe Aaron. October 31, 1979. "Bay Area Video Coalition, 1977–79: *Western Exposure* Series." Box R2055 Series 200R, Record Group A83. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.
- Klein, Howard to Chloe Aaron. January 10, 1980. "Bay Area Video Coalition, 1980–81: *Western Exposure* Series." Box R2055 Series 200R, Record Group A83. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.
- Klein, Howard. "Testimony of Howard Klein, Director for the Arts for the Rockefeller Foundation. Prepared for the Subcommittee on Foundations of the Senate Finance Committee," 4 "Bay Area Feasibility Study, 1975. Box R1501, Series 200R, Record Group A79. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.
- Koch, Stephen. "Reflections on SoHo." in *New York, Downtown Manhattan, SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film*, edited by René Block, Ursula Block, Kurt Thöricht, 105–141. Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976. An exhibition catalog.

- Kölbl, Alois and Johannes Rauchenberger. "A Void That Looks Back at You..." *Kunst und Kirche* pt 2 (2004): 71–76.
- Kraynak, Janet. "Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman's Environments." *Grey Room* 10 (Winter 2003): 22–45.
- Kressel, Henry. *Competing for the Future: How Digital Innovations are Changing the World*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Kudielka, Robert, ed. *The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley. Collected Writings 1965–1999*. London: Thames and Hudson, in association with the Serpentine Gallery, London, and De Montfort University, 1999.
- Larson, Kay. "Through a Screen, Dimly." *New York*, September 12, 1983, 86–87.
- Leach, Neil. *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.
- Lebrecht, Gordon. "Stan Douglas: Living the Drive." *Parachute* 103 (July–September, 2001): 26–41.
- Lee, Robert E. *Television: The Revolution*. New York: Essential Books, 1944.
- Levi Strauss, David. "'Oh, Socrates': Visible Crisis in the Video and Television Work of Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville." *Artscribe International*, no. 74 (March/April 1989): 59–63.
- London, Barbara. Interview by John Johnston. "From Video to Web: New Media Yesterday and Tomorrow—An Interview with Barbara London," *Art Papers*, November/December 2001, 25–29.
- London, Barbara. "Video Spaces." *Performing Arts Journals* 18, no. 3 (September 1996): 14–19.
- Loos, Adolf. *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897–1900*. Edited by Aldo Rossi. Translated by Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982.
- Lütticken, Sven. "Media Memories." In *Inconsolable Memories: Stan Douglas*, edited by Stan Douglas, 123–134. Omaha, NB: Joslyn Art Museum, 2005. An exhibition catalog.
- Lutze, Peter C. "Alexander Kluge's 'Cultural Window' in Private Television." *New German Critique*, no. 80 (Spring–Summer, 2000): 171–190.

- MacCabe, Colin with Mick Eaton and Laura Mulvey. *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- MacDonald, Kent. "The Commercial Strip: From Main Street to Television Road." *Landscape* 28, no. 2, (1985): 12–19.
- Maconie, Robin. "Stockhausen at 70: Through the Looking Glass." *The Musical Times* 139, no. 1863 (Summer 1998): 4–11.
- Manovich, Lev. "To Lie and To Act: Potemkin's Villages, Cinema, and Telepresence." <http://www.braintrustdv.com/essays/telepresence.html> (accessed June 5, 2008).
- Manovich, Lev. "Welcome to the Multiplex: Documenta 11, New Generation Film Festival (Lyon), LA Film Festival's New Technology Forum." <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0207/msg00003.html> (accessed August 30, 2004).
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso and Pino Masnata, "La radia (1933)," transl. Stephen Sartarelli. Reprinted in Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds. *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 265–266.
- Margolies, John. "TV: The Next Medium." *Art in America* 57, no. 5 (September–October 1969): 48–55.
- Masséra, Jean-Charles. "Pierrick Sorin: arrêt sur le ratage" [Pierreck Sorin: Focus on Failure] *Art Press*, no. 185 (Nov. 1993): 46–7.
- Mattelart, Michèle and Armand Mattelart. "'Small' Technologies: The Case of Mozambique." *Journal of Communication*, 32 Issue 2 (June 1982): 75–79.
- McCall, Anthony. Interview by Gautam Dasgupta, "Interview: Formalist Cinema and Politics," *Performing Arts Journal* 1, no. 3, (Winter 1977): 51–61.
- McCarthy, Anna. *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- McCarthy, Anna. "TV, Class and Social Control In the 1940s Neighborhood Tavern." In *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*, 29–62. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

- McCarthy, Thomas. "Preface." In *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, edited by Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer, ix–x. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.
- McRobbie, Angela. "Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique." *Screen Education* 34 (1980): 37–49.
- Mellencamp, Patricia, ed. *Logics of Television*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Mignot, Dorinne, ed. *Revision: Art Programmes of European Television Stations*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Art Museum, 1987.
- Minow, Newton. *Equal Time: The Private Broadcaster and the Public Interest*. Edited by Lawrence Laurent. New York: Atheneum, 1964.
- Modleski, Tania. "The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work." In *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan, 67–74. The American Film Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 2. Frederick: University Publications of America, 1984.
- Moholy-Nagy, László. *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture*. Translated by Daphne M. Hoffmann. New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, Inc., 1932.
- Morley, David. *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London: Routledge, 1986.
- MoMA.org | The Collection | Bill Viola, *Stations* (1994).  
[http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A7898&page\\_number=3&template\\_id=1&sort\\_order=1](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A7898&page_number=3&template_id=1&sort_order=1) (accessed June 10, 2008).
- Mondloch, Katie. "Be Here (and There) Now: The Spatial Dynamics of Screen-Reliant Installation Art." *Art Journal* 66 no. 3 (Fall 2007): 20–33.
- Morley, David. *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Morris, Meaghan. "Banality in Cultural Studies." In *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, edited by John Storey, 147–67. London: Arnold, 1996.
- Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture." In *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gregory Battcock, 222–235. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1968.

Morse, Margaret. "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, The Mall and Television." In *Logics of Television*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp, 193–221. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, *Art video confrontation '74*. Paris: Musée d'art moderne, 1974. An exhibition catalog.

Museum of Modern Art press release. February 1979, "Projects: Video XVI"

Museum of Modern Art press release. January 1980, "Fields of Blue: Nan Hoover's Video Installation on View at MoMA"

Nagourney, Adam. "Reimagining a Downtown." *The New York Times*, May 10, 2002. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A01E2D61130F933A25756C0A9649C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1> (accessed September 12, 2006).

Narboni, Jean and Tom Milne, eds. *Godard on Godard*. Translated by Jean Narboni and Tom Milne. New York: da Capo Press, 1986.

Nash, Mark. "Art and Cinema: Some Critical Reflections." in *Documenta 11\_Platform 5: Exhibition, Catalogue*, edited by Okwui Enwezor et al., 129–136. Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002. An exhibition catalog.

Nauman, Bruce and Michael Auping. "A Thousand Words: Bruce Nauman Talks about Mapping the Studio." *Artforum*. 40, no. 7 (March 2002): 120–121.

Nauman, Bruce. Interview by Michele De Angelus. "Interview with Bruce Nauman, May 27 and 30, 1980" in *Please Pay Attention, Please: Bruce Nauman's Words*. Edited by Janet Kraynak. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 197–296.

Negt, Oskar and Alexander Kluge. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Forward by Miriam Hansen. Translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Nelson, Cary and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, eds. *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

*New York, Downtown Manhattan, SoHo: Ausstellungen, Theater, Musik, Performance, Video, Film*. Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Berliner Festwochen, 1976. An exhibition catalog.

- Ouellette, Laurie. *Viewers Like You? How Public TV Failed the People*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Paik, Nam June. "Expanded Education for the Paperless Society," *Radical Software* 1, No. 1 (Spring 1970): 7–8.
- Paik, Nam June. "Utopian Laser TV Station," *Radical Software* 1, No. 1 (Spring 1970): 14.
- Paik, Nam June. "Global Groove and Video Common Market." In *Nam June Paik: Video 'n' Videology, 1959–1973*, edited by Judson Rosebush. Syracuse: Emerson Museum of Art, 1974.
- Paik, Nam June to the New School for Social Research, "Projects for Electronic Television." In *Video 'n' Videology*, edited by Judson Rosebush. Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1974.
- Palmer, Daniel. "Walter Benjamin and the Virtual: Politics, Art, and Mediation in the Age of Global Culture." *Transformations*, no. 15 (November 2007). [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_15/article\\_11.shtml](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_15/article_11.shtml) (accessed January 14, 2008).
- Pasolini, Antonio. "Looping: from A to B and back. Again and again and again....," <http://www.kamera.co.uk/features/looping.php> (accessed May 31, 2006).
- Paterson, Mark. *Consumption and Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Pearce, Susan M., ed. *Museum Studies in Material Culture*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989.
- Penley, Constance. "Les Enfants de la Patrie." *Camera Obscura*, nos. 8-9-10 (Fall 1982): 32–59.
- Petro, Patrice. "Mass Culture and the Feminine: The 'Place' of Television in Film Studies." *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1986): 5–21.
- Pfeiffer, Paul, et al. *Orpheus Descending*. New York: Public Art Fund, 2001.
- Pfeiffer, Paul. "The Sun is God." *Tate Etc*, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 90–93.
- Pfeiffer, Paul. Interview by Jennifer Gonzalez. "Paul Pfeiffer." *Bomb*, no. 83 (Spring 2003): 22–9.

- Pomona College Art Gallery. *William Wegman: Video Tape, Photographic Works, Arrangements*. Claremont, Calif.: The Gallery, 1971. An exhibition catalog.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Gerald Fitzgerald. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- “Public Art Fund presents... Artist Paul Pfeiffer’s *Orpheus Descending*: A video installation documenting the life-cycle of the chicken at the World Trade Center PATH Entrance.” Public Art Fund Press Release.  
[http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/release/pfeiffer\\_release.html](http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/release/pfeiffer_release.html) (accessed June 25, 2005).
- Querido, Arie. *Inleiding tot een integrale geneeskunde*. Leiden: Stenfert Kroese, 1955.
- Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- “Resources: Groups.” *Video History Project*.  
<http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/groups/gtext.php3?id=33>  
 (accessed September 28, 2005).
- Richard, Frances. “Bruce Nauman-DIA Center for the Arts.” Sperone Westwater  
<http://www.speronewestwater.com/cgi-bin/iowa/articles/record.html?record=158> (accessed August 26, 2008)
- Riley, Bridget. Interview by Mel Gooding. “The Experience of Painting.” In *The Eye’s Mind: Bridget Riley. Collected Writings 1965-1999*, edited by Robert Kudielka, 121–127. London: Thames and Hudson, in association with the Serpentine Gallery, London, and De Montfort University, 1999.
- Rose, Brian. *Television and the Performing Arts: A Handbook and Reference Guide to American Cultural Programming*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Rosebush, Judson, ed. *Nam June Paik: Video ‘n’ Videology, 1959-1973*. Syracuse: Emerson Museum of Art, 1974.
- Rosler, Martha. “Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment.” In *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, 31–50. New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990.
- Ross, Andrew. *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989.



- Royoux, Jean-Christophe. "The Conflict of Communications." In *Stan Douglas*, 56–71. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993. An exhibition catalog.
- Rush, Michael. *Video Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003.
- Rush, Michael. *New Media in Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2005.
- Ryan, Paul. "Cybernetic Guerrilla Warfare." *Radical Software* I, no. 3 (Spring 1971): 1–2.
- Schiesel, Seth. "Fitness for Every Body: O.K., Avatar, Work With Me." *The New York Times*, May 15, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/15/fashion/15fitness.html?scp=1&sq=fitness+for+every+body&st=nyt> (accessed May 20, 2008).
- School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *Watching Television: A Video Event*. Urbana-Champaign: School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1983. An exhibition catalog.
- Schjeldahl, Peter. Interview by Kurt Wolgamott. <http://www.unl.edu/macaa/pdfs/InterviewSchjeldahl.pdf> (accessed August 26, 2004).
- Schjeldahl, Peter. "The Global Salon: European Extravaganzas." *The New Yorker*, July 1, 2002, 78, Issue 17, 94.
- Sege, Irene. "Leading a Double Life," *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 2006. [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2006/10/25/leading\\_a\\_double\\_life/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2006/10/25/leading_a_double_life/) (accessed May 11, 2008).
- Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.
- Serra, Richard and Carlota Fay Schoolman. *Television Delivers People*, 1973.
- Silverstone, Roger. *Television and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Simon, Joan, ed. *Bruce Nauman*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1994. Catalog raisonné.
- Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- SKOR, "Foundation Art and Public Space," <http://www.skor.nl/article-1527-en.html> (accessed June 18, 2008).

- Smith, Roberta. "Art of the Moment, Here to Stay." *New York Times*, February 15, 1998, Section 2, 1.
- Smith, Roberta. "Getting Caravaggio from Video, with Several Hearts of Darkness." *The New York Times*, January 9, 2004.  
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C07EFDB1E31F93AA35752C0A9629C8B63&scp=1&sq=Getting+Caravaggio+from+Video%2C+with+Several+Hearts+of+Darkness&st=nyt> (accessed June 12, 2006).
- Smith, Tony. Interview by Sam Wagstaff. "Talking with Tony Smith." *Artforum*. 1, no. 4 (December 1966): 18–19.
- Sobchack, Vivian. "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh." <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/fingers.html> (accessed December 10, 2008).
- Sorkin, Michael, ed. *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.
- Spigel, Lynn. "Introduction." In *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, 1–40. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Spigel, Lynn and Jan Olsson, eds. *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Spigel, Lynn. "High Culture in Low Places: Television and Modern Art, 1950-1970." In *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, edited by Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 313–346. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room For TV*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Spigel, Lynn and Denise Mann, eds. *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- Stan Douglas: Le Détroit*. Basel: Kunstalle Basel, 2001. An exhibition catalog.
- Stanton, Yan. "Stan Douglas," in *Seeing Time*, exhibition of the Kramlich collection at the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe,  
<http://on1.zkm.de/kramlich/douglas> (accessed June 18, 2007).

- Stephanson, Anders. "Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Fredric Jameson." In *Social Text*, No. 21, "Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism" (1989): 3–30.
- Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam Books, 1992.
- Stern, Lesley. "I Think, Sebastien, Therefore...I Somersault: Film and the Uncanny." *Australian Humanities Review* (November 1997).  
<http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-November-1997/stern2.html>  
 (accessed June 5, 2008).
- Stewart, Robert. "Paik's Peak." *The Real Paper*, October 21, 1978.
- Stockhausen, Karlheinz. "The Origins of Electronic Music." *The Musical Times* 112, no. 1541. (July 1971): 649–650.
- Storey, John, ed. *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*. London: Arnold, 1996.
- Strauss, Anne L. "Bill Viola: *Quintet of Remembrances*" *Metropolitan Museum of Art-The Collection: Recent Acquisitions*.  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/Works\\_of\\_Art/recent\\_acquisitions/2001/co\\_rec\\_modern\\_2001.395a-i.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/recent_acquisitions/2001/co_rec_modern_2001.395a-i.asp) (accessed September 1, 2004).
- Sturken, Marita. "Private Money and Personal Influence: Howard Klein and the Rockefeller Foundation's Funding of the Media Arts." *Afterimage* 14, no. 6 (January 1987): 8–15.
- Tambellini, Aldo. Interview by Barbara Buckner. *Video History Project*, May 10–June 5, June 14–August 14, 1983.  
<http://www.experimentalcenter.org/history/people/pview.php3?id=25>  
 (accessed May 20, 2007).
- "Testimony for Presentation to: The Subcommittee on Communications House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. For Submission to the Record of the Panel Discussions on Public Telecommunications, September 7, 8, 9, 1977." Foundation for Independent Video and Film [Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers], Conference: 1978–80. Box: R1863 Series: 200R Record Group: A82. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.
- Tomkins, Calvin. "Profiles: Video Visionary." *The New Yorker* 51, no. 11 (May 5, 1975): 44–79.
- Ultima Online. <http://www.uoherald.com/news/> (accessed June 10, 2008)

- Uwe Hohendahl, Peter and Marc Silberman. "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture. Jurgen Habermas and His Critics," *New German Critique*, no. 16 (Winter, 1979): 89–118.
- Vaneigem, Raoul. *Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle, Intended to Be Discussed, Corrected, and Principally, Put into Practice without Delay*. Translated by Paul Sharkey Ratgeb  
<http://library.nothingness.org/articles/all/en/display/121> (accessed May 8, 2006).
- Vanderbilt, Tom. "City of Glass." *Artforum* 45, no. 5 (Jan 2007): 45–46.
- Venturi, Robert. *Iconography and Electronics Upon a Generic Architecture: A View From the Drafting Room*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* revised edition. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000.
- Viola, Bill. *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings 1973-1994*. Edited by Robert Violette. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.
- Wagner, Ann M. "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence." *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 59–80.
- Watson, Scott, Diana Thater and Carol J. Clover. *Stan Douglas*. London: Phaidon, 1998.
- Weaver, Sylvester. "Enlightenment Through Exposure." *Television Magazine* (January 1952): 31.
- Weaver, Sylvester. "Enlightenment Through Exposure is NBC Technique." *Musical America* (February 15, 1952): 25.
- Weibel, Peter. "It is Forbidden Not to Touch: Some Remarks on the (Forgotten Parts of the) History of Interactivity and Virtuality." In *MediaArtHistories*, edited by Oliver Grau, 21–42. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society: 1780–1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992.

- Wollheim, Richard. "What the Spectator Sees." In *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, edited by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, 101–150. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Yalkut, Jud. "Electronic Zen: The Underground TV Generation." *Westside News*, August 10, 1967. "SUNY—Stony Brook, Nam June (Video Artist), 1967–68." Box 423, Series 200R, Record Group 1.2. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.
- Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1970.
- Zukin, Sharon. *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2003.